

# **HINDUISM AND UNTOUCHABILITY**

By  
**Swami Sundarananda**  
(of Ramakrishna Mission)

*The real untouchables are the impure thoughts that lurk in the mind, the lying, the covetousness and the deceit which mar our daily dealing. It is these whose contact is contaminating and ought to be shunned.*

Gandhiji

Central Office.  
**HARIJAN SEVAK SANGH**  
Kingsway, Delhi-9



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*By*

**Swami Sundarananda**

*Foreword by*

**Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee**



*Central Office.*

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**Kingsway, Delhi-9**

*Published by*  
**K.S. Shivam,**  
General Secretary  
**Harijan Sevak Sangh,**  
Kingsway, Delhi-9

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**Viyogi Hari**  
**Udyogshala Press,**  
**Harijan Sevak Sangh,**  
**Kingsway, Delhi-9**

**Rupees three only**

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## FOREWORD

The achievement of unity amongst all ranks and classes of Hindus is a problem that has to be solved without delay for the good of the whole of India. Our religion treats all men as equals. Customs have grown up from time immemorial which have created artificial barriers among Hindus. There were periods in the history of our country when such barriers were inevitable. Today we must move with the times. The Hindu race has to be revived and strengthened so that it may build an imperishable foundation on which a free India can rest. Let us boldly take up the task of removal of untouchability from the Hindu fold so that we can all march together towards our desired goal. Distinction between man and man based on mere prejudices creates feelings of hostility which ultimately reacts against our common national welfare. Let us not forget that we are inheritors of a religion which hailed all men as the children of im-



mortality, and let us rebuild our society on an enduring structure of peace and good-will, of progress and liberty. This book will, I hope, serve to focus the attention of the public on a matter of vital importance to future welfare.

Shyama Prasad Mookerjee

5th October, 1945.

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

“Hinduism And Untouchability” was originally published in 1922. It is now published with necessary additions and alterations made up to date. The problem of untouchability has been discussed from the socio-religious point of view in the first chapter and from the national point of view in the second. Emphasis has been laid on the much valued opinions of Swami Vivekananda, the great reformer of modern India, in elucidating the points raised. There is no gain saying the fact that the regeneration of the Hindus and the development of Indian nationalism demand immediate solution of this intricate problem. I shall consider my labours amply rewarded if this book succeeds in creating a desire in the minds of the readers to eradicate the bane of untouchability for ever.

I take this opportunity of conveying my thanks to Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, President, All-India Hindu Mahasabha, for his having kindly contributed a learned foreword. I am

thankful to Swami Sharvananda of the Ramakrishna Math, Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji and Prof. Priya Ranjan Sen of the Calcutta University who have evinced keen interest in the publication of this book and given their kind opinions, appended at the end. In this connection I also acknowledge my indebtedness to Swami Gambhirananda of the Ramakrishna Math, Prof. Jnanendra Chandra Datta, Messrs. Manindra Bhusan Gupta (artist), Prafulla Nath Roy Chowdhury, Managing Director, Pioneer Commercial Bank Ltd. and others for the ungrudging help they rendered me in various ways for bringing out this publication.

Udbodhan Office,  
*Baghbazar, Calcutta.*  
*The 28th May, 1946.*

Sundarananda

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The first edition of 'Hinduism and Untouchability' was received well by both the patriotic press and public. As a result, it was completely exhausted within two years of its publication with the least effort for pushing up its sale. The book was published just a year prior to the achievement of independence by India and almost immediately after that historic event, the Constituent Assembly, set up for framing a constitution, declared India a full-fledged modern Republic. The Assembly, consistent with its great ideal, adopted amidst acclamations on the 29th November, 1948, as one of the Fundamental rights, an Article providing for the abolition of untouchability. The Article reads as follows :—  
Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with Law". Another important Article adopted related to the prohibition of discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste or

sex. Members of the Scheduled Caste in the Assembly welcomed the provisions for abolition of untouchability and hailed November 29, 1948, as a red-letter day. This sacred day would go down in history as a day of Deliverance and Resurrection for fifty million Scheduled Castes of India. The momentous decision of the Republican India to eradicate untouchability was welcomed by all sections of people in different parts of the civilised world. Lord Pathick Lawrence, in a statement, said "The Constituent Assembly's decision was heartening news to all friends of India. To carry out fully this great advance in human brotherhood in all ramifications of Indian social life, would be a task worthy of the present leaders of Indian thought and a fitting tribute to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi". It can be unhesitatingly said in this connection that it is also a great tribute to the sacred memory of Swami Vivekananda, who with his characteristic vehemence, denounced untouchability long before any Indian leader ventured to take the field.

The historic Bill to make the practice of untouchability a cognizable offence, which (The Untouchability Offences Act) was passed by Rajya Sabha (Indian Parliament) on the 2nd May

1955, has come into force from the 1st. June, 1955, throughout India. It is a happy augury that all the Provincial Governments have made suitable arrangements for effective implementation of its provisions in their respective States. The scope of the Act is not only confined to the Hindu community, but it also extends to the Jain, Sikh, Muslim, Christian and other communities.

“Broadly, the offences created by the Act may be divided under two heads: (i) Offences relating to religious disabilities and (ii) Offences relating to social and economic disabilities.

“The Act provides that whoever on the ground of Untouchability prevents any person from entering a place of public worship which is open to his co-religionists, or from worshipping or offering prayers, or performing any religious service therein in the same manner and to the same extent as is permissible to his co-religionists, shall be liable to be punished. For the purpose of this provision, persons professing the Buddhist, Sikh or Jain religion, or persons professing the Hindu religion in any of its forms or developments, are deemed to be Hindus.

“The effect of this extended definition of ‘Hindus’ is that if a sectional temple, for exam-

ple, a jain temple, is open to caste Hindus, it shall also be open to persons who are victims of 'Untouchability'.

"The Act provides that persons who are victims of 'Untouchability' shall have access to any shop, public restaurant, hotel or place of public entertainments. Every person shall also be entitled to the use of any utensils and other articles kept in a public restaurant, hotel, dharamshala, sarai or musafirkhana for the use of the general public, or persons professing the same religion as that person.

"Every such person shall be free to practise any profession or carry on any occupation, trade or business. He shall be entitled to the use of any river, stream, spring, well, tank, cistern, water-tap or other watering place, or any bathing ghat, burial or cremation ground any sanitary convenience, any road or passage or any other place of public resort which is open to other members of the public or persons professing the same religion as that person.

"In addition, every such person shall be entitled to the use of, and have access to any place used for a charitable or public purpose maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public, or

to persons professing the same religion as that person. He shall have right to enjoy any benefit under a charitable trust created for the general public or for persons professing the same religion as that person. He is further entitled to the use of any public conveyance.

“Every such person shall be free to construct, acquire or occupy any residential premises in any locality whatsoever, and shall be entitled to observe any social or religious custom, usage or take part in any religious procession. He is also free to wear any jewellery and finery.

“A person who refuses to sell any goods or render any service to any other person on the ground of “Untouchability” shall be guilty of an offence. Such discrimination as providing these services separately is also an offence.

“Further, any economic boycott (a term defined in the widest possible terms in the Act) of any person who exercises any rights accruing to him by reason of the abolition of “Untouchability” by the Constitution, or of those who might refuse to practise ‘Untouchability’ is also a criminal offence.

“No person is to be refused admission to any hospital, or educational institution, or a hostel



attached to any educational institution on the ground 'Untouchability'. Nor after admission he is to be discriminated against, for he is entitled to the same treatment as others.

"Under the penal provisions of the Act it is laid down that if a person refuses to render any service to any person on ground of 'Untouchability' during the course of his profession, trade, calling or employment, the license granted to him in respect of such profession, trade, calling or employment is liable to be cancelled."

"Offences under the Act are made cognizable, that is to say, a police officer to whom a complaint is made about such an offence can arrest the offender without a warrant from a Magistrate".

It is quite clear from the above provisions, as also from Hindu Scriptures that untouchability in the main is a social evil. Consequently its complete extinction primarily depends upon a radical change in our social custom or outlook. Now-a-days, due to the force of circumstances, the evil of untouchability is gradually disappearing from the Hindu Society. Nevertheless, one can see that although untouchability was declared a cognizable criminal offence

by the Indian Parliament, its practice still continues to be a festering sore on our body politic. This book suggests an effective antidote against the fell disease from social, religious and national stand-points, and as such, I think it has still a distinct need to fulfil. Therefore, the utility of the book on the eve of the reorganisation of our national life is quite obvious.

As I have mentioned in the beginning of this preface that the first edition of this book was published just a year prior to the achievement of Independence. Now this edition is coming out in the 13th year of our Independence and within this short (short because 13 years in the life of a nation is nothing) period we have made much progress in the work for the removal of Untouchability that was eating into vitals of our national fabric. Therefore it is in the fitness of things to revise and enlarge this edition so as to bring it upto date.

In conclusion, I acknowledge my indebtedness to the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh, Kingsway, Delhi-9. for kindly bringing out this edition from the Sangh. This famous institution stands for the fulfilment of the same object for

which this book has been written. I therefore, do hereby gladly surrender all rights of the book to the Sangh. My sincere gratitude is also due to Shri K.S. Shivam, General Secretary, Harijan Sevak Sangh, Swami Ranganathanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, New-Delhi, and Shri L.M. Shrikant, Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Government of India, New Delhi, for helping me in various ways to publish this edition.

Lastly I take this opportunity to convey my grateful thanks to the Secretary, Orissa Depressed Classes League, Bhubaneswar, for publishing a translation of the book in Oriya language under the patronage of the Local Government in 1956, as also to the Secretary Bihar Harijan Sevak Sangh, Patna, for his kind consent to publish a Hindi translation of the book early.

The Ramakrishna Mission,

*Belur Math,*

Swami Sundarananda

*Hcwrach Dist. West Bengal.*

14-12-59.





# HINDUISM AND UNTOUCHABILITY

## FIRST CHAPTER

*(Socio-Religious)*

“God sports through man as well. I see man as the embodiment of *Narayana*. As fire is kindled when you rub two pieces of wood together, so God can be seen in man if you have intense devotion. When one is intoxicated with *prema*, one sees God in all beings”.

—Sri Ramakrishna





## Hinduism and Untouchability

In the early Vedic times different members, of the same family used to undertake different occupations of *Chaturvarna* (four castes) according to their inclinations and abilities. Every member of the family was at liberty to adopt any profession he liked best without any obligation. Born of the same parents, one son used to tend the cattle and till the soil; the second son, having perhaps mercantile bias, carried on Trade and Commerce, the third one, being of an enterprising nature, defended his hearth and home against aggressors and maintained peace and order of the country; and again the fourth son, gifted with intellectual and spiritual disposition, pursued the priestly profession. In course of time, when the Vedic Aryans, having grown in overwhelming numbers, scattered and colonised throughout the whole of *Aryavarta*, they divided themselves into four divisions according to their different qualities (*gunas*) and actions (*karmas*)



in order to organise their society and set it upon a sound basis. This fourfold division has been a predominant factor of the Hindu social fabric.

Sri Krishna, the great incarnation of God, said: "The four castes were created by me by the differentiation of qualities and actions, though I am the author of them, know me to be actionless and changeless."<sup>1</sup> Thus he supported the basic principles of the Vedic Rishis who organised the Hindu society according to the qualities and actions suited to diverse temperaments and tendencies of different classes of people. The great law-giver Manu also bears us out on this point when he says: "Internally or externally one's caste should be determined by one's own actions."<sup>2</sup> Kulluka Bhatta, a renowned authority on Smriti and a commentator of the *Manu Samhita*, lays down: "If there be no means to find out or know the caste of any one, then it should be determined according to his

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१. चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः ।

तेस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्वद्यत्तरिमव्ययम् ॥

—गीता

२. प्रच्छन्ना वा प्रकाश्या वा वेदितव्या स्वकर्मभिः ।

—मनुसंहिता

actions.”<sup>3</sup> Even the celebrated social reformer Ballala Sena, the king of *Gauda Vanga*, arbitrarily re-adjusted the Hindu society of Bengal according to these principles.

While studying our scriptures, one can find that many distinguished sages of ancient times could not trace their birth to any decent origin. But it was their qualities and actions that can better be summed up in one word—character—which placed them in an elevated position in the Hindu society and lifted them even to the rank of highly venerated Rishis, the teachers and guides of mankind. In days of yore, a dangerous outlaw like Ratnakara could be turned into Valmiki Rishi, and a meat-seller Tuladhara might be the spiritual guide of Jajali Rishi. Veda Vyasa, the versatile compiler of Vedic lore, was the son of a fisherman's daughter, and Vasistha, though born of a divine courtesan named Urvasi, was a highly respected Rishi of his age. We read in the *Chhandogyopanishad* that Jabala, who is best known by the name of Satyakama,

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३. येषां जातिनिर्णेतुमशक्या कर्मणा तेषां जातिनिर्णयो ।

—स्मृतिसंहिता

although ignorant of the identity of his father, was the founder of a renowned school of Yajurveda. Kripa, Drona and Karna, the great heroes of the *Mahabharata* did not know the names of their fathers. In the *Aitareya Brahmana* we find that Kabhasha Alusha, a low-born Shudra, raised himself to the rank of a Rishi by his unimpeachable character and high spiritual attainments. It is distinctly stated in the *Harivamsa* that Nabhaga and a son of Arista, though of low birth, were admitted into the Brahmin class. Guhaka Chandala enjoyed the friendship of Ramachandra. Vidura, the son of a Shudra mother, was highly respected by Shri Krishna who occupies a unique position in the Hindu pantheon. A careful study of our various scriptures will convince any open-minded man that all the compilers of our social code were actuated by the same inner urge of constructing a magnificent Hindu social edifice or *Varnashrama Dharma* upon the principal basis of the qualities and actions of men. Let us quote here a few sayings from our scriptures to show clearly how a man of lower or higher class could be promoted or degraded according to his good or bad qualities and actions :



“Man gets into a higher caste by virtuous deeds.”<sup>4</sup>

“A Shudra attains the rank of a Brahmin and a Brahmin sinks into the level of a Shudra. Know the same in the case of a Kshatriya or a Vaishya.”<sup>5</sup>

“By doing good religious deeds even men of a lower caste rise to the higher caste and in the same way by doing irreligious acts even men of a higher caste fall to the lower one.”<sup>6</sup>

“Even a Brahmin, guilty of wicked acts and taking bad food, falls from Brahminhood and becomes a Shudra; even so a Shudra, whose soul has been purified by virtuous deeds and who has

४. वर्णोत्कर्षमवाप्नोति नरः पुण्येन कर्मणा ।

—महाभारत, शान्तिपर्व

५. शूद्रो ब्राह्मणतामेति ब्राह्मणश्चेति शुद्धात्म् ।

क्षत्रियाज्जातमेवन्तु विद्याद्वैश्यात्तथैव च ॥

—मनुसंहिता

६. धर्मचर्यया अधन्योऽवर्णः पूर्वं पूर्वं वर्णमापद्यते जातिपरिवृत्तौ ।

अधर्मचर्यया पूर्वोऽवर्णोऽधन्यं वर्णमापद्यते जातिपरिवृत्तौ ॥

—आपस्तम्बसंहिता

his senses controlled, rises to Brahminhood.”<sup>7</sup>

“Not by high parentage, nor by caste but by good deeds one becomes a Brahmin. Even a *Chandala*, O ! Yudhisthira, becomes a Brahmin by good conduct.”<sup>8</sup>

We need not multiply quotations to vindicate that according to our *Varnashrama Dharma* many a *Chandala*, by virtuous deeds, have attained Brahmin-hood. Can there be any stronger reason to justify the uplift of the depressed classes than this ? Is it not then meet and proper that any lower class, which deserves to be promoted to a higher rank for better qualities and actions, should be raised to that social status ? It is clear from our scriptures that every member of a particular class can, by pious or impious character, become a member of a higher or a

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७. ब्राह्मणो वाप्यसद्वृत्तः सर्वसङ्करभोजनः ।

ब्राह्मण्यं तु समुत्सृज्य शूद्रो भवति तादृशः ॥

कर्मभिः शुचिभिर्देवि शुद्धात्मा विजितेन्द्रियः ।

शूद्रोऽपि द्विजवत् सेव्य इति ब्रह्मानुशासनम् ॥

—महाभारत, अनुशासनपर्व

८. न कुलेन न जात्या वा क्रियाभिर्ब्राह्मणो भवेत् ।

चण्डालोऽपि हि वृत्तस्थो ब्राह्मणः स युधिष्ठिर ॥

—महाभारत, अनुशासनपर्व

lower caste. Every caste of the *Chaturvarna* in ancient India had its code of conduct; neither birth nor right was the ground for any one to be called a Brahmin or a Kshatriya or a Vaishya or a Shudra, but conduct was the only criterion.

The Hindus should remember that the all-pervading influence of the later-day degraded Buddhists and other allied sects, and also that of foreigners who ruled over India for several centuries, have contributed substantially to the demolition of the old structure of the Hindu society. As a result of the repeated internal revolutions and external invasions which threatened the very existence of the Hindus, the old laws of the *Varnashrama Dharma* became inoperative in the Hindu society long ago. Now, certain blind and meaningless customs and practices, as also some local prejudices and usages have taken the place of pristine laws and begun to govern the society everywhere.

As regards the origin of the present caste system, Dr. B.S. Moonje says, "There has been one more result, equally terrible of Buddhist propaganda in India we see it in the sociology of the Hindus. As a non-violent repulse to ferocious violent attacks of forcible proselytisation persistently indulged in throughout the

Moslem period of seven hundred years, the Hindus evolved a system known as the Caste System being conscious of their inability to repel violence with violence." This system, in the opinion of a section of sociologists, put a check to proselytisation of non-violent Hindu masses to some extent during the period of Moslem supremacy, but it bred many serious evils and damned them to perpetual slavery. It has been the root cause of division of the Hindus into innumerable warring sects, which, in turn, have brought about their degeneration and downfall. Analysing the defects of the caste system, Rao Bahadur C. V. Vaidya, the celebrated historian of Maharashtra, in his *History of Medieval Hindu India*, says, "The result of the Caste System is that, about 10% of the population is fit and disposed to fight; while the remaining 90%, by nature and heredity, is not fit to fight and is, therefore ready to accept the rule of any nation which happens to be successful." So serious attempts need be made to reform the Hindu society in a manner consistent with the changed conditions of the time as well as with our traditional religion and culture.

Swami Vivekananda, the patriot-saint of modern India, preached the necessity of rebuild-

ing the Hindu social edifice upon the firm foundation of the original *Chaturvarna* (four castes). He said, "We must revive the age-old laws of the Rishis. We must initiate the whole people into the codes of our old Manu and Yajnavalkya with a few modifications here and there to adjust them to the changed circumstances of the time. Do you not see that nowhere in India now the original four castes (*Chaturvarna*) are to be found? We have to re-divide the whole Hindu population, grouping it under the four main castes of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, as of old. The numberless modern subdivisions of the Brahmins that split them up into so many castes, as it were, have to be abolished and a single Brahmin caste made by uniting them all. Each of the three remaining castes also will have to be brought similarly into single groups, as was the case in Vedic times." The great Swami wanted to level down the distinctions of privilege by helping every one down to *Chandala* to attain the right to *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* (Virtue, Wealth, Desire and Liberation).

The fourfold natural divisions have existed in all societies in all climes and ages. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are found



not in theory but in practice among all races in some form or other. Knowingly or unknowingly the people of every country or the followers of every religion are divided into these four main fundamental classes according to their qualities and actions. These classes are mutually interdependent. Each class is best in its own place. There is no place for exclusive privilege for any class in any matter in the equitable arrangement; but there are equal opportunities for all in all kinds of self-improvement. The social structure of the Hindus is a veritable sociological common-wealth.

Sri Shankaracharya Swami of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham observes, "Castes cannot be classified as high or low for individual or communal pride and vanity. They are effective in natural groups of individuals for the purpose of division of social and spiritual functions for the common good of the community with particular characteristics and modes of living in respect of the different functions of each hereditary *Varna*. The spiritual realisation of a butcher by the discharge of his duties as prescribed by *Shastras* is in no way different from the realisation of a pious Brahmin in the discharge of his duties as in the case of *Dharma Vyadha*. Though the

Vedas contemplate four main *Varnas*, owing to human weakness and consequent admixture of *Varnas*, different *Jatis*, many of which are also mentioned in the Vedas, have resulted and such progenies, instead of being ousted from the Hindu fold have been allotted special avocations and spiritual guidance. \* \* These sub-divisions, which originated for stabilizing and preserving the community, have now become a source of weakness to the mother community."

.. We may be tempted to ask a number of questions : Why then is the wheel of Hindu society moving in an opposite direction, ignoring the rules laid down in our scriptures ? Why has it been set a-going in defiance of the authority of the *Arya Rishis* ? Who has set it in motion apparently for crushing the depressed classes ? History bears testimony that the Hindu society could not move with the spirit of time due to its long-standing internal and external troubles. Consequently, the provincial usages, blind orthodoxy and superstitions triumphed over the fundamental principles as inculcated in the edifying teachings of our scriptures. As a result of this sad state of things, the Hindus have been reduced to their present miserable position.

'In every sphere of this phenomenal world

the old order changeth yielding place to new', and what was justifiable at one time may cease to be so under changed conditions. But our orthodox present-day social leaders seem to think that they would fail to preserve the integrity of Hinduism if they relax the stringent restrictions on the society even to a reasonable extent. So, at times they appear to be oblivious of the principles of social growth which were recognized by the Smritis that were composed from time to time to meet necessary social emergencies. Forgetting this, many conservative people vaunt in season and out of season of their birth rights and hierarchical glory. Most of them are obsessed with a false sense of prestige and are impervious to the creative forces working in the social *milieu* under altered conditions of time. They overlook the fundamental principles of the Smritis, and occasionally pour out vials of venom on the depressed classes, not knowing that the social laws have also been framed by the authors of the Smritis for uplifting the low and the degraded to the rank of the most advanced class of society in all respects.

The present-day Hindus have ignominiously allowed themselves to be bound by the fetters

of customs, superstitions and bigotry. If anybody does not tamely submit to orthodox views, and tries to break the social barriers by destroying prejudices in order to create a new social status for the depressed classes, the conservative classes raise a cry in the name of preservation of *Varnashrama Dharma*. Thus they stand in the way of ameliorating the conditions of the depressed classes. If a touchable man drinks a glass of water touched by a Scheduled Caste—however superior the latter may be to the former in every respect—his *Dharma* is considered to be polluted! He is excommunicated and is no more regarded as having any right to live decently in this world! The Scheduled Castes in Malabar are forbidden to walk on public roads! The *Sanatani* Hindus take purificatory bath if they happen to see any low-caste person anywhere! Sometimes the latter is assaulted by the former on the plea of trespass on public road. But the same human being, who is miscalled low-caste, becomes an equal then and there after conversion to Moham-medanism or Christianity! Evidently the Cancer of untouchability is rampant there. South Indian orthodoxy is adhering to medievalism and

is irresponsive to the demand of this twentieth century. Not only in the Madras State, but in many villages of other States also the barbers, washermen, boatmen and other professional classes refuse to render their respective services to the Harijans even to this day. The conservative Hindus hesitate to buy milk, vegetables, rice, etc. brought by Scheduled castes for sale to village markets. But they do not feel any scruple at all to purchase those very raw edibles brought to market by any untouchable immediately after his conversion to Mohammedanism or Christianity. Rajputs and Jagirdars in the Mewar State do not allow the Harijans to use umbrellas and ride in palanquins, and also to ride on horses. A public meeting of the depressed classes, held at Ahmedabad on the 21st Oct. 1945, passed a resolution drawing the attention of the Viceroy and the Governor of Bombay to the harassment of the depressed classes by the caste Hindus in villages resulting in the migration of the former to towns. But are all these the dictates of the *Varnashrama Dharma*? Does the *Varnashrama Dharma* really permit us to condemn and abhor a certain section of men and women as untouchables simply because of their birth? Does it lend

support to the imposition of unjustifiable and vexatious restraints upon a certain group of our fellow beings, as also to the contemptuous treatment meted out to them? Does it allow us to keep down a section of human beings who want to go up by dint of their good qualities and actions? Swami Vivekananda, the great preacher of the real *Varnashrama Dharma*, emphatically declared: "A religion, which does not feel for the miseries of the poor, which does not uplift man, forfeits the name of "religion." Our religion has degenerated into a creed of the 'touchable' and 'untouchable'. O my God, the country whose best intellects have for the last two thousand years busied themselves as to the propriety of taking up food with the right hand or left, only courts and deserves downfall!"

Some supporters of the *Varnashrama Dharma*, belonging to the diehard orthodox class, seek to maintain their supremacy by adducing a series of shallow, puerile and maudlin arguments in the sacred name of religion in support of their autocratic notions about the Scheduled Castes. But there is a fly in the ointment. They do not care to realise this naked truth that the mighty forces working for the regeneration of Hinduism:

in this twentieth century are pregnant with a power which is sure to do away with the undue privileges of a certain community and the unjustifiable treatment accorded to another. Whatever they may say now, it is no use shutting their eyes to the illuminating fact that the underlying constructive principle of the *Varnashrama Dharma* is such as ensures the good of humanity at large. It teaches its votaries to give up egoism and to work selflessly for common weal. In the end, it aims at attaining the highest spiritual perfection by being and becoming one with and immersed in the Supreme Brahman.

From time immemorial spirituality has been the very backbone of the Hindu race. A Hindu child is brought up and guided by the uplifting principles of the religion of his forefathers throughout his life and in all spheres of his activities. These principles play an important part in moulding his character and leading him to the kingdom of heaven. Our great ancestors, the Arya Rishis, organised the Hindu society and laid down certain laws to guide it in consonance with certain eternal principles. It is evident that the Hindu religion and society, although belonging to two distinct categories, are so closely connected with each other that

they have come to be treated as quite the same entity. The Hindu religion aims at the realisation of the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, -the Supreme Being, by self-sacrifice, self-control and renunciation. The ultimate aim and object of the Hindu society is to attain the same perfection through various types of activities. Apparently it is occupied with the distribution and the specialisation of work according to different qualities and actions of men, resulting eventually in the building up of a society upon the basis of maximum effectiveness, mutual love and hearty co-operation.

The ideal man of the Hindu society or *Ashrama/Dharma* is a Brahmin. But who is a Brahmin? "A man is born as Shudra; performing the sacred thread ceremony, he becomes a *Dwija* (twice-born); going through the Vedas, he becomes a *Vipra*; and knowing the Brahman, he becomes a Brahmin." So, a Brahmin is the embodiment of purity, morality, wisdom and spirituality, that is to say, a man of complete perfection. He is said to be '*Nara-Narayana*', the synonym of which is Superman or Godman,

६. जन्मना जायते शूद्रः संस्काराद् द्विज उच्यते ।

वेदपाठाद् भवेद् विप्रो ब्रह्म जानाति ब्राह्मणः ॥



His life is to be dedicated 'for the salvation of his own self as well as for the good of the world.'<sup>10</sup>

While studying our holy scriptures we find that ideal Brahmins like Vyasa, Vashistha, Valmiki, Vishwamitra and others attained salvation by being and becoming one with the Supreme Brahmin, and completely renouncing all kinds of secular prospects and prosperity, name and fame, and even the sovereignty of the world as mere dust of the street. They led lives of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice for the good of the society. The religion they practised for the attainment of this Brahmin-hood was not the customary or formal religion, but that religion which underlies all other religions and brings us face to face with our Maker. The great object of our society is to raise the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras to the rank of this Brahmin-hood from their respective positions by slow, steady, and gradual progress. Swami Vivekananda, the great reformer of modern India, said in a speech at Kumbhakonam, Madras, on his return in 1897 from the Chicago Parliament of Religions : "Such is the ideal of our caste,

meant for raising all humanity, slowly and gently towards the realisation of the great ideal of the spiritual man who is non-resisting, calm, steady, worshipful, pure and meditative. In that ideal there is God." The fulfilment of this ideal entirely depends upon raising the untouchables to the cultural status of the Brahmins.

But our present-day society, having completely deviated from the great ideal of *Sanatana Varnashrama Dharma* class system, is seeking to put a barrier on the path of its progress. It has suppressed those who rightly aspire to go up and realize their ideal. The weapon of offence against them has been a silly caste-fantasy linked up with food and drink. We Indians are familiar with the fact how the question of food and drink of the Hindu society has given rise to the depressed class problem which for centuries has been a powerful obstacle to the unity and the progress of the Hindu race.

Hinduism is said to be the 'religion of the stomach!' A Christian missionary sarcastically said: "Other religions may be seated in the mind and soul, but the stronghold of Hinduism is the stomach!" Indeed, it is no use disguising the fact that the stomach has really become the seat of our present-day Hinduism! We may

retain our religious faith against all arguments and violence, but if anybody mixes a bit of certain forbidden food with our dishes, or if perchance any so-called untouchable person happens to touch our food, our *Dharma* is no more! Now-a-days Hindu caste chiefly rests on food and drink, but it was far from being so in our olden days. Therefore it requires men of greater moral courage and of holier earnestness to remove this stigma from the face of our *Varna-shrama Dharma*.

When our scriptures declare that any food touched by particular classes of men should not be accepted, it is to be understood that the prohibition is meant only to keep the mind unaffected by *Tamaguna* (impurities); for 'mind is said to be the only cause of one's bondage as also of liberation.'<sup>11</sup> The great Shankaracharya interprets '*Ahara* is the act of gathering in of the mental impressions through perception of sound etc. by the activities of one's five sensory organs.'<sup>12</sup> The *Chhandogyaopanishad* says: "It is

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११. मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः ।

—ब्रह्मविन्दूपनिषद्

१२. आह्नियते इत्याहारः शब्दादिविषयज्ञानम् भोक्तुं भोग्याह्नियते ।

—शाङ्कर भाष्य

the pure 'Ahara' that purifies one's self.<sup>213</sup> Swami Vivekananda, the celebrated Hindu monk lays down in his *Religion of Love*

"According to Ramanuja there are three defects of food which we must avoid. First, *jati*, the nature or spices of the food; all exciting food should be avoided, meat, for instance; this should be avoided because it is by its very nature impure. \* \* Eating meat is only allowable to people who do very hard work, and who are not going to be Bhaktas; but if you are going to be Bhaktas, you should avoid meat, and also, all exciting foods, such as onion, garlic, and all evil-smelling food, as 'sauerkraut'. \* \* As regards food, the next thing is still more intricate to western minds,—it is what is called *ashraya*, i. e. the person from whom it comes. This is rather a mysterious theory of the Hindus. The idea is that each man has a certain aura around him, and whatever he touches, a part of his character, as it were, his influence is left on that thing. Just like the effluvia flowing out from one's body character also is said to be emitted and permeates every thing one touches. So, we

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१३. आहारशुद्धी सत्त्व-शुद्धिः ।

—छान्दोग्योपनिषद्

must take care, who touches our food when it is cooked;—any wicked or immoral person must not touch it. \* \* The other is *nimitta*. It is very easy to understand. Dirt and dust and all these things must not be in the food. \* \* Then, we must not eat that food, half of which has been eaten by someone else,—for instance, when one man takes a bite of an apple and gives it to another to eat. When these things are avoided in food, the food becomes pure, pure food brings a pure mind, and a pure mind, a constant memory of God.” Undoubtedly these three aspects of the food question are the only ground of our scriptures upon which discrimination of food is based.

Now let us see what our scriptures say ;

Lord Krishna refused the dishes served by Duryodhana, the then emperor of India, but accepted the dishes served in the house of Vidura, the son of a slave Shudra-mother. While refusing the invitation of Duryodhana, he said, ‘The food, which is defiled by wickedness, is not eatable.’<sup>14</sup> He went to the residence of the noble minded Vidura who ‘brought lots of clean

१४. सर्वभक्षणं भोक्तव्यमन्नं दुष्टाभिसंहितम् ।

—महाभारत, उद्योगपर्व

and excellently prepared food and drink for Mahatma Keshava.<sup>15</sup> Madhusudan did not only partake of Vidura's food, but also distributed it along with riches among the Brahmins, well-versed in the Vedas.<sup>16</sup>

"In the house of Yudhisthira, the Truth Incarnate, hundreds and thousands of *Dasis* (maid-servants) with pots in hands, distributed food among the visitors (*atithis*), day and night."<sup>17</sup>

"Kaushika Rishi, the best of the twice born, entered the beautiful house of Dharmavyadha (a butcher); he, being offered a seat, accepted the seat and water (*achamana*)."<sup>18</sup>

१५. ततः क्षत्रान्नपानानि शुचीनि गुणवन्ति च ।

उपाहरदनेकानि केशवाय महात्मने ॥

—महाभारत, उद्योगपर्व

१६. तैस्तर्पयित्वा प्रथमं ब्राह्मणान् मधुसूदनः ।

वेदविद्भ्यो ददौ कृष्णः परमद्रविणान्यपि ॥

—महाभारत, उद्योगपर्व

१७. शतं दासीसहस्राणां यस्य नित्यं महानसे ।

पात्रहस्तं दिवारात्रमतिथीन् भोजयत्युत ॥

—महाभारत, विराटपर्व

१८. प्रविश्य च गृहं रम्यमासनेनाभिपूजितः ।

पाद्यमाचमनीयञ्च प्रतिगृह्य द्विजोत्तमः ॥

—महाभारत, वनपर्व

The great epic *Ramayana* is also full of instances in which this problem of food has been solved in the same way as in that of the great epic *Mahabharata*. When Rama was going to forest in exile, his bosom friend Guhaka a Nishada (Chandala) by caste, hearing of his friend's arrival came and offered all sorts of excellent food and drink, etc.<sup>19</sup> But Rama was banished; so, being a hermit, he could not accept the dishes. He therefore, 'embraced' him again with his arms which are fit to embrace sages and excused himself expressing his regret.<sup>20</sup> Then again, one day Rama went to the house of a low-class woman named Shramani and accepted the *achamana* and food provided by her.<sup>21</sup>

In olden days, the Brahmins, who were generally known to be the intelligentsia or the

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१९. भक्ष्यं भोज्यञ्च पेयञ्च लेह्यं चैतदुपस्थितम् ।

—रामायण, अरण्यकाण्ड

२०. भुजाभ्यां सुधुवृत्ताभ्यां पीडयन्वाक्यमब्रवीत् ॥

—रामायण, अरण्यकाण्ड

२१. पादमाचमतीत्यञ्च सर्वं दद्याद् यथाविधि ।

तस्मिन्वाचं ततो रामः श्रमणी धर्मसंस्थिताम् ॥

—रामायण, अरण्यकाण्ड

literary class in society, were adored for their spiritual qualities and altruistic services rendered for the good of society. But they have now come down from their former exalted positions to be domestic cooks, hotel keepers etc. ! Cooking is undoubtedly serving and is not their duty according to our scriptures. Cooking is the caste-occupation of the Shudras. In olden times, the Shudras used to be cooks of all the classes of the Hindus.

The *Āpastām̐bā Sāmhita* in very clear terms says :

“The Aryans are the masters and Shudras are to cook food.”<sup>22</sup>

Even our great law-giver Manu, who assumed a stern and tyrannical attitude towards the Shudras, distinctly lays down :

“If a Shudra is unable to serve the twice-born and his wife and children are in distress, he may maintain himself by *karuka karma* (the work of a cook).”<sup>23</sup>

२२. आर्याधिष्ठिता वा शूद्राः संस्कर्तारः स्युः ।

—आपस्तम्बसंहिता

२३. अशक्नुवंस्तु शुश्रूषां शूद्रः कर्तुं द्विजन्मनाम् ।

पुत्रदारात्ययं प्राप्तो जीवेत् कारककर्मभिः ॥

—मनुसंहिता



Then again in another context he says :

“*Ardhika, Kulamitra, Gopala ( milk-man ), Dasa (slave) and Napita (barber)*—the cooked food of all these classes of Shudras can be eaten, as also of any one who offers to the Self.”<sup>24</sup>

The reputed law-giver Yajnavalkya also supports the same view.<sup>25</sup>

Sayings exactly of this kind are to be found in the *Yama Samhita* and *Paroshara Samhita* as well.

It is clear from the above that food is not polluted by the touch of any class of men but by the wickedness of the person that touches. The Shudras used to be cooks of the Brahmins in olden days although it is objected to at present.

Moreover, in our glorious days, no class of men were subjected to such repression and distress as our present-day depressed classes by being designated as untouchables merely for the

२४. आधिकः कुलमित्रञ्च गोपालो दासनापितौ ।

एते शूद्रेषु भोज्यान्ना यश्चात्मानं निवेदयेत् ॥

—मनुसंहिता

२५. शूद्रेषु दासगोपालकुलमित्रार्धंसीरिणः ।

भोज्यान्ना नापितश्चैव यश्चात्मानं निवेदयेत् ॥

—याज्ञवल्क्यसंहिता

accident of their birth for which no man is virtually responsible. The Vedic Rishis preached the fundamental equality of man, allowing difference only in respect of character and qualities. Questions of their 'touchability' and 'untouchability' had no reference to birth. But they were based on the good or bad moral or immoral, religious or irreligious character of men belonging to all the four castes.

The eminent orthodox Hindu leader Lokmānya Bal Gangādhār Tilak said : "There is no basis in the Hindu Śāstras for untouchability. History told them that on the battle-field water was carried for drinking in leather bags by the so-called untouchables. \* \* It is inevitable and most urgent that they should be educated and given opportunity for the service of the country and for the sacred cause of the Motherland." It is true that some of the modern Smritis prohibit eating food from the pots of some particular Shudras, but this is quite different from partaking of food prepared by Shudras. The reason is clear : A Shudra's pot may not be clean and pure, and by his touch a *Tamasika* (impure) influence may be left on the food, hence the prohibition. This interdiction, however,

was relaxed in cases of unavoidable emergencies. Now-a-days, the pots of the majority of the so-called Harijans are as clean and pure, and their qualities and actions are as good as those of the so-called touchable high castes; nay, in some instances, much better. Now, "the difference between the Brahmins and Shudras," in the language of Medhatithi, the celebrated commentator of the *Manu Samhita*, "is not as between cows and horses!" Really the difference is as between tweedledum and tweedledee.

Too often it is the case that rights and privileges are claimed by the higher castes on account of birth rather than character and qualities. Caste is now hereditary rather than functional. Brahmins, for instance, are not wanting who may not have even turned the pages of the Vedas, may not even know the *Sandhya* (the morning, noon and evening prayers of a Brahmin), not even the *Gayatri* (a very sacred verse repeated by every Brahmin at the time of his *Sandhya*), yet they are Brahmins all the same and desire to be respected! While there are Harijans or Shudras, who though well-versed in the Vedic lore, are abhorred and shunned! This is an absurd state of things, and social reformers will do well to show what in its origin

was not objectionable has become a terrible superstition and as foolish as the fable of the cat, which, though, well known, is worth repeating :

"A great spiritual man<sup>26</sup> who had a cat in his house, used to tie up the animal when he retired as it used to disturb him if at liberty. By and by, the people in the locality were stupid enough to think that to possess a cat and tie it up when proceeding to perform their religious rites was necessary and in accord with *Sadachar* or approved practice, having lost sight of the true reason for the action of the great personage whom they believed they were imitating. Such really to my mind is the case in regard to untouchability which now prevails to the utter discredit of our nation, and it is to be devoutly wished that this cause of discredit should cease to be a hindrance at no distant date to national progress and well-being."<sup>27</sup>

Now-a-days, no educated man, excepting a few die-hard bigots, sincerely believes in the efficacy of the present-day caste system which

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<sup>26</sup> Presidential address delivered by Justice Subrahmanya Iyer, at a meeting held at Mylapore, Madras, in commemoration of the great Tamil saint and poet Tiruvalluvar of Tiru Kural fame who was of Valluva caste. *The Indian Social Reformer*, 1915.

entirely rests on one's privilege of birth and on a curious notion of touch-fantasy. Unfortunately this microscopic educated minority is generally seen to be swayed by the influence of the overwhelming ignorant majority sunk in antiquated social customs and superstitions. Thus our society has become a drag and the younger generation is compelled to accept the existing social evils against their conviction. As a result, many of them are seen to be diametrically opposite in their social and private lives. Even now many high Caste people go to relish dainties in public restaurants, and yet when they come out of those places, they pose as leaders of society and guardians of Dharma and frame rules to support 'don't touchism!' Therefore, the sooner we turn over a new social leaf, the better it will be for ourselves and for the reputation of our forefathers whom we revere so much.

To turn to our subject : Where are we Hindus drifting? Ponder over the state of our custom-ridden present-day society which is going on in a devil-may-care way laying aside the teachings of our scriptures. Now, the Hindu society is following neither the Vedas and Vedantas, nor the Smritis and Puranas, nor the foot-prints

of our revered Rishis of old, nor our religious reformers; but it is being tossed about like a vessel in the midst of a tempestuous ocean without its rudder. There has been hardly any pilot to steer the vessel of the Hindu society for some time past. Consequently, the local and provincial customs and usages, resulting from hereditary superstitions and bigotry, are standing in the way to our national solidarity and progress.

On a study of the social conditions of the glorious ages of Hindus, one will find that in those periods, the caste system was based on the qualities and actions of men, and its sole object was to raise all members of the society to Brahmin-hood. The object of food and drink usages was to save the entire body of the society from Tamaguna or corruption. They did not repress any group of their fellow brethren that constituted part and parcel of the Hindu society. Shri Ramachandra and Shri Krishna, the great Avatars, who won for themselves a place in the hearts of all the Hindus, clearly preached this doctrine underlying the caste and touch system. They were followed by all the later reformers. Lord Budha the veritable image of universal brotherhood the world has ever seen, was born a divine redeemer of the fallen, the low, the

untouchable and the depressed all the world over. The Jain Tirthankars preached in a thundering voice; "Non-injury as the supreme religion."<sup>27</sup> Ramananda, Madhva, Nimbarka, Rāmanuja, Chaitanya and other Vaishnavite reformers of India were breakers of caste and touch-system based on birth.

Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami narrates in his *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, an authoritative scripture of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, that Rai Ramananda, a house-holder devotee of a very high order and an erudite scholar belonging to Shudra caste, naturally hesitated, inspite of repeated requests, to expound the Radha-Krishna cult of the *Bhagavata* to Sri Chaitanya, who was an aristocratic Brahmin by birth and also a Sannyasin. Therefore, the latter, with a view to removing the doubts of the former, said: "A Brahmin, or a Sannyasin, or even a Shudra, who knows the mystery of Krishna, is my preceptor." The *Vaishnava Tashini*, another holy text of the Vaishnavas, holds the same view. It says: "Even a *Chandala* should be taken as the best of the Brahmins if he is endowed with devotion.

to Hari,"<sup>23</sup> It is distinctly mentioned in the *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* that Sri Chaitanya, on his way to a pilgrimage to Prayaga from Vrindavana, converted a band of Mohammedan Pathan cavalry to Vaishnavism and admitted them socially into his sect. Vrindavan Das writes in his *Sri Chaitanya Bhagavata*, a very sacred book of the Vaishnavas, that he, who makes distinctions of castes among the Vaishnavas, is born miserably again and again. So, it is clear that according to Vaishnavism, as soon as a man becomes a Vaishnava, he is bound to lay aside all kinds of caste considerations and touch fallacies. But alas, now-a-days—

"Their sanctity rests more or less

On what they eat and how they cook!"

Most of the present-day Vaishnavas are not courageous enough to carry out the catholic code of their great masters.

Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and other epoch-making reformers of modern India emphatically preached against this anti-Hindu caste and touch system existing



in our present-day society. They urged the necessity for justice and of removing all disabilities imposed upon the depressed classes in the name of our ancient culture and Hindu religion. Swami Vivekānanda said : "The present day religion of the Hindus is not in the Vedas, nor in the Puranas, nor in *Bhakti*, nor in *Mukti*-religion has entered into the cooking-pot. The present day religion of the Hindus is neither the path of knowledge, nor that of reason—it is—'Don't touchism,' 'Don't touch me !' 'Don't touch me !'—that exhausts its description. See that you do not lose your life in this dire irreligion of 'Don't touchism'. Must the teaching—'Look upon all beings as your own self'<sup>29</sup>—be confined to books alone ? How will they grant salvation who cannot feed a hungry mouth with a crumb of bread ? How will those, who become impure at the mere breath of others, purify others ? 'Don't touchism' is a form of mental disease !"

The Scheduled Castes have long been shut out from religion. They are not allowed to enter into temples and worship images or to chant the Vedic hymns and pray. If any person of the Scheduled Caste being of a religious turn of

mind, wants to evoke God's grace by ecstatic devotion, he is laughed at by our orthodox classes and his devotional fervour is characterised as sheer madness. Not only this, he is also humiliated, ridiculed, insulted, and if possible driven away as a wretch fit to worship stones and devils! In the midst of this kind of unmerited persecution and awful degradation, there sprang many notable saints in different parts of our country, from the so-called untouchable classes. Among them some were the chief disciples of the saints who are still worshipped as incarnation of God, and some were independent religious reformers of very high order. They are as yet held in high esteem and reverence from the Himalayas to Kanya Kumari.

Tiruppana, also called Munivahana, who is honoured as one of the Vaishnavite Alvars of Southern India; was a Pariah. He was prohibited to approach the precincts of the famous temple at Srirangam which is situated on the northern bank of the Cauvery. The saint used to take his seat daily on the southern bank of the sacred river with his face turned towards the temple for meditating and singing songs in praise of Ranganatha, the deity of the temple. On one such occasion, Loka Saranga Muni, a

priest of the temple, came there to take water for worship of the Lord. But he, having found the outcaste Tiruppana on the other side of the river, could not take water, as it would be, he thought, polluted by the presence of the outcaste ! The priest, therefore, flung a stone at the saint to scare him away. It caused him severe wound and profuse bleeding therefrom. Tiruppana went away quietly without any feeling of vengeance. That very night Ranganatha is said to have appeared before the priest in his dream and rebuked him for the heinous act. The Lord ordered him to bring the saint on his shoulders to Him in expiation of his sin. Loka Saranga Muni had implicit faith in the Lord. He actually carried out His command which was against the time-honoured convention of the temple. Tradition goes that Tiruppana chanted a Tamil poem in His presence in ecstatic devotion and merged in Him. An image of this renowned saint had been installed within the precinct of the temple.

An analogous tradition is connected with Nandanar, the celebrated Saivite saint of the Pariah caste. It is said that Nataraja commanded a priest to allow the saint to enter into the sanctum of the famous temple at Chidambaram. The other priests, doubting the authenticity of

the command, arranged a sort of bonfire in front of the shrine for testing his purity and saintliness. Nandanar unhesitatingly walked over the burning fire unhurt and entered into the Lord and became one with Him. The classical *Thevaram* (Tamil hymn), which he chanted on this occasion, is being recited with devotion by all the Saivite devotees all over Southern India even to this day.

Chokka, an *Atishudra* saint of Maharashtra, was not allowed entrance into the famous temple at Pandarpur. He used to pray to the Lord of the temple from a safe distance. It was a pretty long time before the conservative priests of the temple were compelled to allow him to enter into the shrine because of his uncommon spirituality and unalloyed purity.

It is exceedingly interesting to notice that the images of the untouchable saints Tiruppana Alwar, Nandanar Chokamela and Nampodwan are daily worshipped and their birth-day ceremonies observed in Srirangam, Chidambaram and Madura temples by the orthodox Brahmin priests even to this day. The wonder of wonders is that our brethren the caste Hindus including the deified Brahmins deem themselves really fortunate to seek salvation in the sublime

teachings of those so-called untouchable saints. On the other hand, it testifies to the catholic spiritual-outlook and the highmindedness of a section of the conservative Brahmins.

Hindústan witnessed many great religious movements started by the saints and holy men sprung from the untouchable classes. Their lives and teachings are embellished with many legends and miracles. The culture, which emanated from them, fertilised the spiritual soil of India.

The celebrated Vaishnavite reformer Ramanda, being ostracised for breaking the rigid law of caste and touch in course of his pilgrimage, founded, in a spirit of protest, a sect of his own which spread far and wide in the medieval period. Ruhidas alias Ravidas and Kabirdas were very influential among his twelve chief favourite disciples. Their sacred names have become household words all over India. We find in the *Bhaktamala*, a very popular scripture of the Vaishnavas that Ruhidas was born of the Chamar caste, whose caste-trade is to deal in hide and leather. The great Chamar devotee used constantly to chant Vishnu's name in rapture while tanning the hide. The legendary anecdote about his devout career, as narrated by an autho-

rity, tells us that he rose to the highly honoured position of a spiritual guide from his lowest position struggling with poverty, persecution and tyranny. He initiated hundreds and thousands of people into his new faith. Mirabai, a distinguished votaress belonging to a royal family of Rajputana, and Suradas, a celebrated lyric sage of the United Provinces, were the disciples of Ruhidas. Influential Vaishnava sects still exist in the names of both the saints. Kabirdas, who came of the Mohammedan 'Jalaha' community, boldly preached monotheism to the Hindus and Mohammedans alike denouncing all images. He successfully organised a vast religious sect of his own in his province. Tulsidas, the author of the Hindi *Ramayana*, Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, Sena, a mystic saint hailing from the barber caste, and Dhana, a sage coming of the Jat caste, were his renowned disciples. Kabir's son Kamal and Kamal's disciple Dadu, although Mohammedans by birth, were founders of two big sects and preachers of the unity of Hinduism and Islam. Garibdas, a Mohammedan disciple of Dadu was a reputed saint. He was the originator of a religious sect which professed a liberal faith.

Tiruvalluvar was a celebrated Valluva saint.

He is looked upon as an incarnation of Saraswatī and his memorable work the Tirukural is called the *Panchama Veda* or Tamil Veda. A shrine exists in his honour in the suburb of Madras where actual worship of the saint takes place daily.

Imbued with the lofty teachings of Ramanujacharya and Madhwacharya, Srikrishna Chaitanya appeared on the soil of Bengal, prepared by the life long spiritual activities of the lyric poets Jayadeva, Chandidas and Vidyapati. He and his chief follower Nityananda preached a doctrine of love and devotion to all men irrespective of their castes and creeds. They initiated many Buddhists and Mohammedans into Vaishnavism. The writers of the Vaishnava hagiology testify to the fact that Haridas Thakur, who was best known as Brahma Haridas, although an untouchable, was a very pious and devout devotee among the most favoured followers of Sri Chaitanya. It is stated in the *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* that on one occasion Haridas said to Sri Chaitanya in a mood of humility : "I am untouchable. So I beseech you not to touch me." Sri Chaitanya replied : "I touch you to be purified. Because, you are purer than a Brahmin or a Sannyasin." The sacred memory

of this canonised devotee is still cherished with reverence by the Vaishnavas.

Thus Sadhna, Charandas, Mulukdas, Chandidas, Balaram Hadi, Kesha Pagla, Chokhamela, Nampudwan and innumerable other saints, who sprang from the untouchable classes, founded many well-organised and influential religious sects in their respective provinces throughout India. These illustrious saints worked with might and main not only to do away with the canker of untouchability but also to pave the way for essential unity between the Hindus and Muslims. "They were scorned, insulted and driven away from homes and temples. But the saints flinched not. Through persecution, through scorn and infamy, they stuck to their faith, followed the light that shone in their souls. Nor did they bear any ill will towards those that persecuted them. The meekness, the devotion, and the perfect saintliness of them are indeed memorable for all time. \* \* While Buddha and Sankara roll on like mighty rivers, these little streams too shall not flow unnoticed ; the weary traveller or peasant may often turn to them and refresh himself in their pure waters."<sup>30</sup>

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30. *India's Untouchable Saints* by K.V.R. Ramaswami B.A.



It is generally believed that the key to the door of modern Hinduism is in the possession of a few top-ranking high caste people who have erected a strong barricade of "don't touchism" around them in the name of our scriptures. This has become an instrument of oppression in their hands, and is felt as such by the leaders of the down-trodden people. In the eyes of the latter it is hatred pure and simple that has been the moving spirit of the conservative high castes in dealing with the Scheduled Castes. Those who hold that the religious achievement of a person does not consist so much in the cultivation of the spirit of love as Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and Ramakrishna, Vivekananda proclaimed, as in observing certain superstitious formalities of caste, having a strong background of hatred, deserve the opprobrious epithet of lunatics. Swami Vivekananda was of opinion that the old priestcraft is entirely responsible for the present plight of the Hindu society. He declared : "Root out priestcraft from the old religion and you get the best religion in the world. Do you understand me ? Can you make a European society with India's religion ? I believe it is possible and must be." \* \* Our ancestors freed religious thought, and we have a wonderful religion; but they put a

heavy chain on the feet of society, and our society is, in one word, *horrid, diabolical* ! In the West, society always had freedom, and look at them. On the other hand, look at their religion. Liberty is the first condition of growth. Just as a man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, dress and marriage and in every other thing, so long as he does not injure others. \* \* Try to revive society on the old grounds of universal salvation and equality as laid down by the old Masters, such as Sankaracharya, Ramanuja and Chaitanya. \* \* Beware ! All expansion is life, all contraction is death. All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is, therefore, the only law of life. He who loves, lives; he who is selfish is dying."

In the interest of the Hindu religion itself, it ought to be clear to its followers that the retention of the existing laws of caste based on hatred must necessarily drive a considerable section of the depressed class Hindus to despair. The latter will be compelled to seek their social salvation by embracing Christian or Mohammedan faith. Already a large number of the Hindus, mostly belonging to the backward and tribal classes all over India, have become Mohammedans and

Christians and their number is increasing year after year due to ill-treatment meted out to them and disabilities imposed upon them by the upper classes. The untouchable Hindus turn into touchables and enjoy equal rights and privileges by becoming Christians or Mohammedans then and there. Mr. Rajagopalachariar, who was the Chief Minister to the Government of Madras during the congress regime, stated at a meeting of the Indian Christians held at the Robertson Y.M.C.A., Nagpur, in December, 1944 : "You have seen with your own eyes in the villages, that the untouchables are not allowed to take water from village wells, but the very moment they are converted to Christianity they can use the wells of the village. I am not pleading that it is logical, but as soon as a Harijan becomes a Christian he is entitled by the social law to take water from the village well. The Harijan untouchable who is a Hindu cannot touch this water, but the moment he is baptised he uses the water without the help of any constable. That is the good influence you spread by being everywhere, and the social law itself helps you. If a Hindu untouchable becomes a Muslim he is entitled to "touch" ! Similarly about Christians. Therefore, even the lowest in the social scheme

in India's dark corners can, by becoming Christian, enjoy these privileges.

It is no exaggeration to say that the greatest number of the Mohammedans and Christians of India are converts from the Hindus. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, President, All-India Hindu Mahasabha, analysing the causes and consequences of this suicidal policy of the Hindu society, observed: "But have we ever asked ourselves why it is that such a large number of people left the Hindu faith and took to another religion? I shall exclude those who were forced to do so by the fear of sword, but surely not an inconsiderable number of our brethren also left because of the inequities and hardships that confronted them in their own society. Untrue to our highest traditions, we occupied ourselves with outward forms and practices and forgot the absorbing capacity of our religion. This rigidity destroyed our strength and solidarity, and contributed to our downfall." Some say that it is not hatred but customs handed down from generation that have tied the depressed classes to the galling yoke of the orthodox high castes, therefore, no attention need be drawn to their cause. If it is not hatred, notwithstanding all the good interpretations attributed to it, how could a bigot

justify his deeds of flagrant injustice done to the untouchables in the name of *custōm*, while he himself is seen to violate the same in his daily life in a hundred different ways? Be it an outcome of custom or anything, it must be admitted that it has caused the depressed classes to smart under the vilest type of tyranny of the orthodox higher classes and has thus cast a slur on the good name of Hinduism itself. Therefore, "to lift them from the position to which Hindu society has reduced them is," in the very language of Mahatma Gandhi, "to remove a big blot on Hinduism. The present treatment of these classes is a sin against religion and humanity."

Let us frankly admit that the Hindus are in a confused and morbid condition today, because they have not been socially loyal to their own religion which requires them to look upon 'all living beings as Brahman.'<sup>31</sup> A renowned Western tourist asked an eminent Indian admirer of Hindu philosophy : "If your philosophy is so lofty, why is the Hindu society in such a degraded condition?" The latter, in reply, quoted *Gita* and said that the Hindus had not translat-

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३१. जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः ।

ed their philosophy into action. The learned tourist agreed and remarked : "There have been endless discussions as to whether the ultimate teaching of the *Gita* is action, or devotion or knowledge, and no final decision has been arrived at. Perhaps there will always remain enough room for controversy in this vexed question. But there is no doubt about the fact that 'action' must at least be a means to a higher end. And few people have taken care of the means. The result is talk, talk, talk, and a barren philosophy !" It is really an indisputably glaring fact that notwithstanding the grand philosophy of the Hindus, hitherto unsurpassed by any other ethical code evolved by any civilised nation, they are very sadly lacking in their ardour to put its precepts into action—specially in their social lives. The disparity between their theory and practice has been the root cause of their degeneration and downfall. Swami Vivekananda emphatically declared : "No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and low in such a fashion as Hinduism. The Lord has shown me that religion is not at fault, but it is the Pharisees and Sadducees in Hinduism, hypo-

crites, who invent all sorts of doctrines of *Paramarthika* and *Vyavaharika* (absolute and relative) truth."

Hinduism is founded on the Vedanta. This sublime philosophy comprises the psychology of dualism, qualified non-dualism and non-dualism which differ from one another slightly in views and rituals only. It does not identify itself with any particular school of philosophy nor does it harbour any sectarian doctrine. It comprehends all systems of spiritual thoughts and sects with their respective symbols, ceremonials and rituals. The various aspects and various phases of the Vedanta philosophy have a central truth—a common ground of psychology which has been recognised by the different religions of the world. The highest ethical ideal of the Vedanta is the attainment of universal love in its purity and fulness destroying all distinct traits of personality. It eliminates the duality of the Creator and the created—God and man. So, there is no warrant for seeking sanction of Hinduism while we look down upon a group of our brothers and sisters as untouchables and impose arbitrary restrictions upon them under the plea of time-honoured customs and *Dharma*.

The Advaita or non-dualistic Vedanta is profound both in philosophy and theology. Its highest realisation is oneness, which, when properly interpreted, means an absence of all distinctions between the One Supreme Eternal All-pervading God and the soul of man—between I and you—between mine and thine. The *Kathopanishad* says: 'He is One, has all things under His control, is the Soul of all souls and makes His One Self appear as many. Those of serene mind who realize Him inside their own selves, enjoy eternal bliss and not others.'<sup>32</sup> The *Gita* which contains the essence of the Vedanta, declares: 'The same I am to all beings; there is none worthy of hatred or love to Me. Verily, they, who worship Me with devotion, are in Me and I am also in them.'<sup>33</sup> Thus Lord Krishna found the true basis of equality in the recognition of all souls as essentially divine. He discarded the artificial social distinctions by declaring: "Those who take refuge in me (the Divine), O! Partha, though born of a sinful origin, women, Vaishyas, even Shudras, also

३२. एको वशी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा एकं रूपं बहुधा यः करोति ।

तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरास्तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं चेत्तरेषाम् ॥

कठोपनिषत्



attain to the highest goal (liberation)."<sup>34</sup> We find in the Hindu scriptures that the great saints Vachaknavi, Maitreyi, Samvarta, Raikwa, Dharma Vyadha and others, who were either women or outside the pale of the *Varnashrama Dharma*, also attained salvation. It is regrettable that the present-day Hindu society is not practically following this highest ideal of equality. This is really a defect which has to be remedied now, and the Hindu society is to be reconstructed on the basis of the Vedantic teachings embodied in the *Gita*.

To a real Vedantin all the different names and forms are mere illusion, this world is pervaded by *Maya*, this life is a dream. The cause of our dualistic perception is ignorance. But behind the phenomena of this manifested universe of senses, there is One Reality without a second Who is appearing as many. When this One Omnipotent, Omniscient, Unchangeable, Absolute Brahman or soul, manifested in various forms, is realised, the illusory idea of plurality vanishes, just as the illusory appearance of a

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३३. समोऽहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेष्योऽस्ति न प्रियः ।

ये भजन्ति तु मां भक्त्या मयि ते तेषु चाप्यहम् ।

—गीता

snake is changed into a piece of rope. Thus a Vedantin, having seen the One Absolute God dwelling alike in all beings and all things, declares that all living beings are God, God is all living beings, 'all living beings are nothing short of God.'<sup>35</sup> So, according to the Vedanta, men—nay all animate beings are not only the creation of God, but God Himself. Hence 'if a man sayeth, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.'<sup>36</sup>

The wonderful doctrine of Advaita or oneness is a well-grounded principle necessary for the cultivation of universal love, before which even the doctrine of the brotherhood of man pales into insignificance. Jesus Christ said: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you."<sup>37</sup> The *Ishopanishad* says: "The wise man, who perceives all beings as not

३४. मां हि पार्थ व्यपाश्रित्य येऽपि स्युः पापयोनयः ।

स्त्रियो वैश्यास्तथा शूद्रास्तेऽपि यान्ति परां गतिम् । (P. 68)

—गीता

३५. स जीवः केवलः शिवः ।

—मैत्रेयुपनिषत्

36. The New Testament

—St John

37. The New Testament

—St Matthew.

distinct from his own self at all, and his own self as the self of every being, does not, by virtue of that perception, hate any one.”<sup>38</sup> The application of this highest principle of the Advaita Vedanta which proclaims the One Eternal Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute hidden in all beings, high and low, would solve the problem of the down-trodden Harijans of India. It would rouse up their faith in themselves, and teach others to regard and worship them as the veritable manifestations of God Himself.

३८. यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।  
सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥

—ईशोपनिषत्







# HINDUISM AND UNTOUCHABILITY

## SECOND CHAPTER

*(National)*

“Forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers.”

—Swami Vivekananda



## Hinduism and Untouchability

It is quite consistent with the teachings of history to say that neither the formation of a common nationality nor democracy is possible in India so long as her people continue to be heterogeneous due to the divisions of castes and creeds as they happen to be now. The Indian patriots unanimously admit that the conflict of interests between the depressed classes and the privileged orthodox ones is so sharp, that it has put formidable obstacles on the path of national solidarity which is India's prime desideratum at present for her progress and well-being. Of course a clash of interests and differences there is and shall always be, but this should not be at the cost of unity, co-operation and friendly intercourse among the members of the different communities, as has been the case in our country for centuries. It would not be an exaggeration



at all to say that in India even the conflict of interests between the Englishmen and the Indians, sometimes and in some fields, sinks into insignificance when compared with that between the touchables and the untouchables. Therefore, it is the first and foremost duty of every patriotic Indian to reconcile and re-adjust the differences between the Brahmins and the Pariahs by organising our society *de-novo* in consonance with our religion as well as with the spirit of the age. The insistent agitation for the establishment of democratic government in a country, where the demos is not integrated into one social whole and is not inspired by a common cause, is like pouring water on the branches of a tree while starving its stem and roots.

All patriotic sons of India, who have seriously addressed themselves to the task of national regeneration, firmly hold the belief that India can be emancipated from her abject position of hewers of wood and drawers of water within a short time by means of national unity. Indeed, by national unity and solidarity alone economic autonomy of India can be achieved. But these are sadly lacking in the Indians. It cannot be denied that the different classes of the present-day Hindu society are acting as isolated units

and not co-operating with one another. Their individual or class interests have yet to be subordinated to the interests of the nation. The submerged classes and the orthodox superior classes stand as poles asunder. The unnatural sense of social inferiority, which the depressed classes are made to feel from day to day in their social intercourse with the conservative caste Hindus, serves only to give rise to discontent and disaffection in their minds and prevents the growth of unity and a healthy spirit of citizenship engendered by the consciousness of their rights and duties that such a spirit implies.

The mutual distrust and jealousy the hideous off-spring of untouchability, have devitalised the Indian body politic and severely affected the growth of our national solidarity. Those who are actuated by an earnest and sincere desire to raise India from her present state of torpor, unanimously admit that in proportion as the acerbities due to class cleavage disappear, her unifying force tends to become stronger. It is beyond doubt that the freer is the scope the quicker will be the progress of her self-governing institutions.

It would be an act of sheer ingratitude on our part if we do not thankfully acknowledge

that mighty unifying force which is silently but surely at work among Indians irrespective of their differentiations to awaken them from the slumber of centuries. This is the best of all the gifts that Western civilisation has conferred on India. The vast net-work of improved communications between citizen and citizen and province and province, the respect for common law, common rights and privileges of citizenship, which are some of the valued gifts of the Western civilisation and culture, have instilled into the daily life of the Indian people a spirit of mutual helpfulness and co-operation. The Indian National Congress and other patriotic organisations have done and are still doing all that lies in their power to place all Indians on an equal footing. But their efforts, although conducive to unity that India so long sadly lacked, have not proved strong enough to place her on a sound footing owing to the backwardness and deplorable social condition of the suppressed classes. We think that no extraneous arrangement, however good and efficient, can arrest the tendency to separation, and harmonise the jarring interests of the vast population of a country, unless and until the underlying evil is weeded out by mutual love and toleration. Justice Ranade, in course of an

address delivered in Calcutta in 1896, said : "The State, after all, exists only to make individual member composing it nobler, happier, richer, and more perfect in every attribute with which we are endowed and this perfection of our being can never be insured by any outside arrangement, however excellent, unless the individual member concerned is himself prepared in his own private social sphere of duties to co-operate in his own well-being." It is a trite saying that a race cannot be changed unless it changes itself. If we, therefore, want to effect a permanent change in the angle of vision of our race, our whole work must necessarily consist in dealing with the individuals and changing their inner nature.

The Western civilisation has introduced into India its characteristic ideals of equality, fraternity and self-respect. We are glad to see that India, regenerated by the influence of the West and inspired by the forgotten glory of her ancient culture, is forging ahead and doing many things to shape her future religious, social, political and economic destinies. But it pains us to record that this spirit of the religious resurgence and national regeneration has received a severe setback from the unnatural social inferiority and

the unimaginable backwardness of the depressed classes who form the very back-bone and marrow of our national organism. So, this sense of social inferiority, this state of illiteracy and poverty of the masses, which have induced them to assume the proverbial Rip-Van-Winkle attitude of absolute indifference even to their individual welfare, must at all costs be eradicated to avert the impending catastrophe.

Educated modern India, moved by a lofty sense of self-respect which the twentieth century has awakened in her, is loudly claiming equal rights and privileges of citizenship with the other members. While fully appreciating the heavenly inspiration with which our front-ranking patriotic leaders are enthused for the national advancement of our country, we, at the same time, are constrained to say that they have not done all they ought to have done for their suppressed fellow brethren. Our educated countrymen preach against the frantic racial egoism and colour prejudice of the white races. They clamour against the Indentured Labour Act and the Trading and Occupation of Land Restriction Act or Pegging Act of the South African colonies. They complain against the ill-treatment meted out to the Indians in Australia, Fiji and

other colonies. But what are they doing to remove the humiliating stigma of 'untouchability' put upon their fellow countrymen owing to their social inferiority conditioned by the 'accident of birth? This amateurish attitude can be aptly characterised by the well-known saying—'What is sauce for the gander is not sauce for the goose! Swami Vivekananda said : "It is a far cry for India to establish relations of equality with foreign nations, until she succeeds in restoring equality within her own bounds.

Sriyukta Basanti Devi observed : "I wonder sometimes whether we deserve that treatment that is meted out to us by the Government and Europeans. We want to mend or end this system of Government, because it makes distinction between race and race and we say that justice demands that there should not be any difference between the children of the soil and the foreigners who come here to make money, and if there is to be any difference it should be in favour of the Indians. But who are you to say that there should be no difference between man and man when for centuries you have looked down and refused even to treat as human beings, a large section of your flesh and blood—the so called depressed classes? You demand justice and fair

play for yourself but when you come to deal with the Harijans you deny justice to them. I say, the question of untouchability and caste is not a mere social question but a political one. Whatever may be said in favour of the caste system, it is admitted by all, including the most orthodox amongst the Hindus that the system in its present form and development is pernicious. \* \* I feel that we shall never attain true freedom unless the curse of untouchability and the caste system, practised as at present in India is wholly removed."

How can we reconcile our sense of patriotism to the attitude of non-chalance to the present problem of untouchability which demands immediate solution? The eminent leaders of our country, who inaugurated the mighty movement of political independence, could not ignore the disadvantages that have been caused by the spirit of non-co-operation displayed by a section of the depressed classes for the sake of safeguarding their special interests. The oppressed classes do not believe in the good intentions of the caste Hindus who are demanding equal rights and privileges with the other citizens of the British Dominions and at the same time heaping abuses upon their kith and kin. Surendra Nath Baner-

jee, the celebrated leader, wrote in *The Bengalee* on the 13th December, 1909 :

"No one who is familiar with the history of political and social evolutions in modern times will, indeed, contend that mere difference in matters of religion, race or even language is an insurmountable obstacle in the path of the formation of a common nationality or of political progress. But where large sections of the people are simply treated as untouchables, where in addition to class differences, there is the pride of caste to reckon with, the sense of social superiority and social inferiority depending upon the accident of birth, the difficulty is far more formidable.

"What is to be our answer, if the subordinate classes themselves ask, as individuals belonging to them have begun to ask, how they should believe in the sincerity of men who while loudly claiming political equality with persons belonging to another race, having a different religion and different traditions, would not treat their own people, men professing the same religion, belonging to the same race and having the same traditions as their equals ?

If our love of equality is genuine, we must prove that it is so, by treating as our equals all



those with whom we come daily into contact and with whom we are related by social and economic ties. If the love of freedom that we profess—freedom in the sense of unrestricted self-determination—is genuine, we must see that, through no fault on our part either of omission or commission, does any section of our people suffer from any unnatural and unjustifiable restraint. It will really be ridiculous if we continue to accord humiliating treatment to a section of our countrymen and at the same time be earnest in the struggle for equality and democracy in which we must have their co-operation in order to succeed in our attempt. For this obvious reason, our national leaders have put removal of untouchability in the forefront of the programme of the Indian national Congress. Mahatma Gandhi emphatically said—“We may be able to right the *Khilafat* wrong, but we can never reach *Swaraj* with the poison of untouchability corroding the Hindu part of the national body. *Swaraj* is a meaningless term, if we keep a section of India under perpetual subjection, and deliberately deny to them the fruits of national culture. We are seeking the aid of God in this great purification movement, but we deny to the most deserving among His creatures the right of hu-

manity. Being human ourselves we may not plead before the Throne for deliverance from the inhumanity of others."

It augurs well for the Hindus that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose successfully carried out this important programme of the Congress by removing untouchability root and branch from the *Azad Hind Fouj* as well as from the civil population under the Provisional Government of Free India organised by him.

Not only the Indian National Congress, but also the All-India Hindu Mahasabha and numerous patriotic Hindu organisations stand for rights of all those suffering from social tyranny and injustice, and for the removal of all barriers. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, while addressing the annual session of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, observed: "Our first and foremost social programme must be the complete removal of untouchability and to regard every one as our equal."

It is a patent fact that the great progress made by the touchable classes in modern literary, scientific and industrial education imparted by schools and colleges, has placed them in a position more advantageous than that of their suppressed brethren. The educational policy of the

Government of India has been to impart education without any distinction of caste or creed. But the untouchables could not make the best use of the costly education inasmuch as

“Chill penury repressed their noble rage,  
And froze the genial current of the soul.”

From time immemorial the backward classes have been generally maintaining industrial and agricultural order of the country and the upper classes plying their pens as well as applying their brains to the philosophies, laws, administration, etc. It will be noticed that there was no conflict of interests between these two sections so long as they respected each other and considered themselves mutually dependent on the ground that the production and distribution of commodities are as necessary vital functions of society as culture of philosophies, literatures, arts, etc. The real conflict of interests arose only when the educated members of the backward classes began to claim equal opportunities in all spheres and encroach upon the exclusive privileges, so long enjoyed by the upper classes. In these days of liberty, equality and fraternity, it is futile to expect that the intelligentsia of the backward classes will ever remain contented with their primitive and economically unsuited caste

professions which are also regarded derogatory from our social stand-point.

The caste profession of the *Mochis* (cobblers) is looked down upon as very filthy. But what right have you to condemn and ridicule them for such a life? Every one is great in his own sphere. Now-a-days, no gentleman can do without a pair of shoes although he does not know how to make them even for his own use; he must have to crave the shoe-maker's favour to have them. Now, would it not be an unpardonable vanity if a man, having purchased a pair of shoes from a shoe-maker, condemns him for his profession as the most accursed wretch? Thus not only the cobblers but also people of almost all other suppressed classes, who are supplying the necessary articles of every day use to every household, though passing a life bordering on semi-starvation, are treated with wanton and ruthless cruelty by the so-called touchable classes, enjoying all the benefits of education and wealth! The fundamental rights of equality have been forcibly snatched away from them for the accident of their birth and for undertaking professions which, though essential for the maintenance of a society, are looked down upon from the social point of view.

Now, for argument's sake, let us take it for granted that the untouchables have come from the dregs of society. But we emphatically ask— who has brought them to that state of miserable life? Did not society compel them to undertake such professions for its own benefit? Are they not induced by society to supply its wants? Do not their works and achievements contribute anything essential to our social life? They have been denied all their rightfull privileges owing to the accident of their birth. The elementary rights and privileges of equality, which they enjoy under what we call the 'alien, bureaucracy', have forcibly been tabooed by their own countrymen on account of their weak and backward position in society !

In Western countries eminent persons like Ramsay Mac Donald, Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln; Stalin, Mussolini and others, although from lower classes, had the rare opportunity of holding highest positions in their respective states and societies. But in India, the doors of all high posts were formerly closed against all members of the untouchable classes. Now-a-days, the situation has changed and the bar, against their occupying the highest posts, has been removed with the dawn of Independence. But the obstacle in the

way of their obtaining an honourable place in the Hindu society still exists on account of ignominious attitude of conservative upper classes towards them. Can there be anything more unjustifiable than this ?

Till now the Harijans were a prey to dumb forgetfulness and were compelled by adverse circumstances to pass their lives unnoticed and unrecorded. But now-a-days, as the number of educated men is growing more and more among them they are becoming less inclined to accept the conditions of life in which they find themselves in the society.

Is it fair and just that the stronger classes should be free to wrong the weaker ones and make them subserve their interests?

The privileged classes, who stand in a position of social superiority, should clearly be given to understand that autocracy has all the world over been a parent of social revolution. It cannot be otherwise in India. The persistent autocratic conduct of the die-hard orthodox section towards their backward brethren has created many complicated problems in the Hindu society. It has driven them to demand separate electorate and reservation of seats in the Government services to safeguard their legitimate interests. This has

ultimately led to the breakdown of the entire Hindu community into two warring divisions in the shape of the caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes under the infamous Communal Award. It is common knowledge to-day, how this apple of discord is aggravating disunity among the Hindus and standing in the way of India's national solidarity. The autocratic treatment of the conservative classes has brought into being an extremist section in the Scheduled Castes that is preaching a hymn of hatred against the caste Hindus and pouring fire and brimstone upon them ! They are saying that the Scheduled Castes must eschew Hindu religion and culture and consider themselves a separate race apart from the Hindus in general. With a view to attaining this object, they are even demanding a separate *Sthan* (region) for themselves. It is a happy augury that another large section among the Scheduled Classes is vehemently denouncing this dangerous separatist move and anti-national claim. If the Hindus take a concerted step timely, they will be able to foil the mischievous attempt of the communally minded section.

The unredeemed tragedy of our national life is that the special possessions and qualities of one class do not tend to foster respect for the

others. "The best ordered state", said Socrates, "is that in which the greatest number of men use the expressions—'this is mine' or 'this is not mine' in the same way and in reference to the same object." He explained his theory by the following illustration: "If only the finger of a man is hurt then the whole frame drawn towards the soul as a centre and forming a united Kingdom under one ruler, feels the hurt and sympathises with it; and we say that the man has a pain in his finger."

That which is true of a single individual is also true of a well-ordered body politic. The Scheduled Castes in Indian polity may be compared to the stomach in the parable of the stomach and members of the body. If the stomach rebels, other members will be killed. The Indians may not be all equal like the fingers of a hand, but they are all indispensable to one another. As long as the body is healthy, if any part is hurt, the pain is communicated to all the parts. This is true also of a well ordered society constituted by different communities.

On account of the social inequality arising from the accident of birth, the depressed classes of India have not been accustomed to look beyond themselves. They do not feel that they



are members of a circle wider than that of their own classes. The national development of a country is decisively against the admission by its society of any divided allegiance. But unfortunately the constitution of the present-day Hindu society is based on the divided allegiance of its classes. The Hindus generally owe their allegiance and show their adherence to their classes rather than to their society or country as a whole. But, if they really aspire to develop as a well-organised nation, they must follow the noble ideals of all homogeneous races which would encourage them to think themselves not as partisans but as citizens primarily in every sphere of their lives. It is essential for the establishment and maintenance of unity of our country that each class should feel for the other classes and contribute to the good of the whole. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee boldly pointed out certain evils that beset our social and national life and for which the Hindus themselves are responsible. It was no exaggeration when he observed :

“ It is no use our merely blaming the British or a section of aggressive Muslim party for attacking our rights or obstructing the liberty of our country. We have also to ask ourselves

whether we, on our part, have contributed the best that we can for building up a complete national life, consistent with the highest ideals of Hinduism. Let it not be forgotten that it is our own weakness, our narrowness, our petty selfishness which strengthen our enemy; and it is our paramount duty to set our own house in order."

In Japan, the *Samurais* were at the top of the social hierarchy, and the *Eta* and *Hiu-in* classes were regarded not very differently from the untouchables of India as the most horrid and abandoned villains the sun ever shone on. But when the Japanese realised that their social inequality was detrimental to national unity and inconsistent with the best interests of their people, they abolished it. In the interests of Japan; the *Samurais* were induced to surrender their hereditary privileges exclusively enjoyed by them and the *Eta* and *Hiu-in* were emancipated by an Imperial Edict of October, 1871. The Edict runs as follows: "The designation of *Eta* and *Hiu-in* is abolished. Those who lose them are to be added to the general registers of the population, and their social position and methods of gaining a livelihood are to be identical with the rest of the people.

"Thus by a stroke of the pen, the boy Emperor, being-guided by the clear heads of Ito, Okubo and other leaders, emancipated the Pariahs of Japan and thus they were enrolled in the population on terms of legal equality, transformed from squatters into land-lords, admitted to the new citizen army, and guaranteed access to all the avenues of promotion formerly closed to them. The Edict of 1871 was for Japan what the Emancipation proclamation of Lincoln was for America; and the Ukase of Czar Alexander in 1851 liberating the Serfs, was for Russia."<sup>39</sup>

It is the duty of every civilized nation to trace the genesis and history of its social phenomena and find out the causes of its backwardness and degradation, and apply suitable remedies accordingly. In India, the remedy does not lie in keeping the subordinate classes under the arbitrary and irresponsible power of the ruling classes. It lies in following the noble examples of the advanced nations of the East and the West and in full and unqualified acceptance of the rights

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39. Presidential address delivered by H.H. The Gaekwar of Baroda at a conference held in Bombay on the 20th April, 1918, with a view to devising ways and means for the eradication of untouchability from the Hindu society.

of equality of all sections of men, with whom we are bound with ties of vital interests. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, president, the Second All-India Social Service Conference, held at Delhi on the 28th December, 1918, spoke as follows in course of her eloquent address: "Was it not India that first accepted the immemorial franchise of humanity? Was it not India that first taught it to the world? Was it not India that taught the law of equality, the law of human responsibility and the great noble creed that the stronger shall serve the weaker and kings shall watch the needs of the poor?"

India will not be able to rise to the position equal to that of other democratic countries of the world until and unless the fundamental principle of equality of man is recognised and brought to bear upon each one of her activity. "Man is free to do," said Herbert Spencer, "what pleases him most, provided he fringes not the equal freedom of others." But here in India the so-called touchables, instead of following this precept of the Western Philosopher have chosen to deny the right of equality to their fellow-beings who constitute a good section of the population, and over whom they have no right to rule except by the right of force. The results

have been obvious : the recrudescence of caste bigotry, fanatical pride of high descent' conceit of spiritual, moral and intellectual superiority, display of arbitrary and irresponsible power, conflicts of interests, differences, dissensions, chaos, squalor and crypto-fascist mentality fed and nursed by the social conditions of the country are terribly in evidence in all the sphere of Indian social life. We fervently appeal to all our educated countrymen to wake up to the gravity of the pitiable situation of their mother country and take suitable measures in time to abolish the humiliating concept of untouchability which sits on the breast of the Indian masses like a dreadful nightmare, and thus pave the way for national unity.

It is a great calamity for Independent India that most of the depressed classes are sunk in the quagmire of poverty and ignorance. It is really regrettable that the majority of them are not even conscious of the evils which have paralysed the energies of their mind and stifled the aspirations of their soul. Their 'artless tale of life' is not heeded by the power-intoxicated classes. They never wavered from the path of virtue 'to heap the shrine of luxury and pride' at the cost of their neighbours. Living remote as they do

from the toil and turmoil of the luxurious world they are free from temptations and snares of vice. But it seems that those, who have better knowledge of the means of making wealth and larger organisations of self-defence, are in a position of superiority over their weaker fellowmen and make themselves masters of their less intelligent and less advanced brethren. Can it be denied that the Scheduled Castes of India have been subjected to systematic exploitation by the money-lending and other profiteering classes mostly belonging to the so-called touchable sections?

The nation, let us remember, lives in the villages, and it is there that we have to fight out untouchability, ignorance, poverty and diseases if we really want to grow into a nation. The religious, social, industrial and economic growth of India entirely depends upon the uplift of the sunken masses, and her national salvation rests on how soon we may improve their condition.

Swami Vivekananda, addressing the upper class Hindus, declared: "However much you may parade your descent from Aryan ancestors and sing the glories of ancient India day and night, and however much you may be strutting in the pride of your birth, you, the upper classes

of India—do you think you are alive? You are but mummies ten thousand years old! It is among those whom your ancestors despised as “walking carrions,” that the little of vitality there is still in India is to be found; and it is you who are the real “walking corpses.” In this world of *Maya*, you are the real illusion, the mystery, the real mirage in the desert, you, the upper classes of India! You represent the past tense, with all its varieties of form jumbled into one. That one still seems to see you at the present time, is nothing but a nightmare brought on by indigestion. You are the void, the unsubstantial non-entities of the future. Denizens of dreamland, why are you loitering any longer? Fleshless and bloodless skeletons of the dead body of Past India that you are—why do you not quickly reduce yourselves into dust and disappear in the air? Aye, in your bony fingers are some priceless rings of jewel, treasured up by your ancestors, and within the embrace of your stinking corpses are preserved a good many ancient treasure-chests. Up to now you have not had the opportunity to hand them over. In these days of free education and enlightenment, pass them on to your heirs, aye, do it as quickly as you can. You merge yourselves in the void and

disappear, and let New India arise in your place.

“Let her arise—out of the peasants’ cottage, grasping the plough, out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer’s shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts and from markets. Let her emerge from the groves and forests, from hills and mountains. These common people have suffered oppression for thousands of years—suffered it without murmur, and as a result have got wonderful fortitude. They have suffered eternal misery, which has given them unflinching vitality. Living on a handful of grain they can convulse the world; give them only half a piece of bread, and the whole world will not be big enough to contain their energy; they are endowed with the inexhaustible vitality of a Raktabija.<sup>40</sup> And besides, they have got the wonderful strength that comes of a pure and moral life, which is not to be found anywhere else in the world. Such peacefulness, such contentment, such love, such power of silent and incessant work, and such manifestation of

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<sup>40</sup> A powerful demon mentioned in the Durga Saptashati, every drop of whose blood produced another demon like him.



lion's strength in times of action—where else will you find these! Skeletons of the Past, there, before you, are your successors, the India that is to be. Throw those treasure-chests of yours and those jewelled rings among them—as soon as you can ; and you—vanish into air, and be seen no more—only keep your ears open. No sooner will you disappear than you will hear the inaugural shout of Renaissant India—ringing with the voice of a million thunders and reverberating throughout the universe—“Wah Guru Ki Fātēh”—victory to the Guru !”

Now, a few suggestions as to the *modus operandi* : For the emancipation of the untouchables from untouchability, men and women have to be appealed to as much on the socio-religious and national sides as on the side of their self-interest. The interest which the leaders feel in this matter, is generally exhausted in their frothy eloquence. They think that their duty in connection with the problem of untouchability is amply done by oral proclamation of a declaratory decree in favour of the untouchables. Besides preaching, men are to be enlightened on the practical means of solving the problem by removing their bad customs and usages which are detrimental to their progress. Ways and means

should be devised and adopted to teach them hygiene and cleanliness effectively. Thus their standard of life is to be raised to the level of that of the advanced classes. Those who are interested in this matter and ready to come forward, should organise a central society with its branches all over India for the uplift of the untouchables in all possible ways.

Meetings should be held under the auspices of the society and the Scheduled Castes invited. They should, after the performance of a certain non-sectarian religious ceremony, be declared as touchables. The gates of our Sanatan Religion with its various denominations, and the doors of our shrines and temples must be thrown open to them all, and a strict social equality be observed in regard to every ceremony. Hindu monks, preachers and lecturers, would have to be urged on to preach the gospel of Hindu religion which teaches that "the full life becomes fuller in the dedication and service for the uplift of the low,"<sup>41</sup> The teachings of the prophets and seers have to be re-interpreted in the light of changed conditions.

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<sup>41</sup> *The Organisation of Social Service : Indians Ideal and Methods*—a paper read at the First All-India Social Service Conference by Prof. Radhakamal Mookherjee.

Arrangement must be made to reconvert the converted untouchables to Hinduism. Any non-Hindu who wants to embrace Hinduism must be warmly received and given a suitable place in the Hindu society. Thus the Hindus should try to increase their numerical strength by willing conversions if they really do not want to commit racial suicide. Swami Vivekananda said : "Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts, returning to their Mother-Church, as it were; but on those who were alienated by conquest or on strangers wishing to join us, no penance should be imposed."

History testifies in unmistakable terms that when Hinduism was dynamic, it absorbed hordes of Scythians; Huns; Parthians, Greeks and other foreign races in its broad bosom. It is known from the Bhilsa inscriptions belonging to the second century of the Christian era that a Greek king named Heliodorus embraced Vaishnavism and erected at Pushkar (Ajmer), in honour of his chosen deity Vishnu, a *Garuda Stambha* (pillar) which is still to be seen there. It is a thousand pities that our religion today has turned static in respect of conversion and lost its power of expansion and absorption. This has considerably thinned down the once huge bulk of Hindu society.

and consequently weakened our faith in a way. The desideratum of the age is to make Hinduism again dynamic and aggressive so that it may resume its onward march with unprecedented speed to a future which is destined to be greater than its great past.

The most important item of work for the upliftment of the depressed classes is the spread of education. By spread of education, we mean the advancement of knowledge in both the oriental and occidental religions, arts, sciences, industries and agriculture among the depressed masses of India. The problem of education of the Harijans admits of its being considered with reference to their special condition. The education which would be imparted in schools must be made suitable to their special circumstances under which their boys and girls would have to work and eke out an honest livelihood. As a matter of fact, this most important work of mass education seeks to solve *inter alia* the problem of untouchability of the depressed classes, which the educated India now-a-days is so very keen about. Our national, social, industrial and economic backwardness is the outcome of the sheer want of education. So, in regard to the practical solution of the problems of the Harijans we

must look forward to the spread of education among them and enable them to specialise in agricultural and technical training according to their needs. We must go to their cottages with the torch of education to enlighten them first as to the ways and means of leading a decent, clean and honest life and develop in them a strong sense of self-respect and duty. And then we may teach them the noble principles of religion and philosophy as far as practicable.

It should be remembered that our national culture has its own peculiar point of view and its peculiar method. In this culture, the supreme end is spirituality, and from that standpoint, the significance and worth of other aspects is to be estimated and evaluated. Our scriptures declare that to impart education to a man is a highly commendable gift and it is still more so when imparted to those who badly need it. Swami Vivekananda truly said : "If the Brahmin has more aptitude for learning on the ground of heredity than the Pariah, spend no more money on the Brahmin's education, but spend all for the Pariah. Give to the weak, for them all the gifts are needed. If the Brahmin is born clever, he can educate himself without help. If the others are not born clever, let them have all the teachings and the

teachers they want. This is justice and reason as I understand."

Reform works, both permanent and occasional, are to be organised among the depressed classes according to their needs to raise them from their hopeless position that holds them down. We have already said that almost all of them are more or less awfully poor. Poverty is sapping their lives. It is weakening not only the physical but also the religious, moral and political life of the whole of India. We cannot expect to uplift the depressed classes and give them proper education and remove their untouchability until we have enough to feed them with. It is only their abject poverty that has brought forced humility, cringing habits, mute indifference and inactivity in them. It is not possible for a locomotive engine to run without fuel for its boiler, nor is it possible for the human body to move without food in its stomach. Who cares for removing untouchability and receiving education with a dreadful pinch of hunger in his empty stomach? Who cares for unity, co-operation, religion, morality and cleanliness when hunger is gnawing the entrails? Therefore, in the face of the perplexing situation of the depressed classes, our first and foremost

duty is to organise a vast net-work of reform activities, both permanent and temporary, according to the needs of the area in a purely non-sectarian spirit with a view to elevating their economic condition. We should remember that external development of the depressed classes is indispensable for their inner development. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said : "It may be that individual can rise above circumstances and environments and reach inner heights. But for large groups and nations a certain measure of external development is essential before the inner evolution can take place. A man, who is the victim of economic circumstances, and who is hedged and restricted by struggle to live, can very rarely achieve inner consciousness of any high degree. A class that is downtrodden and exploited can never progress inwardly. A nation which is politically and economically subject to another and hedged and circumscribed and exploited can never achieve inner growth." For this obvious reason, the All-India *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, Ramakrishna Mission and other organisations are carrying on all round constructive work among the backward classes in different States of India.

As regards reform works for the uplift of the

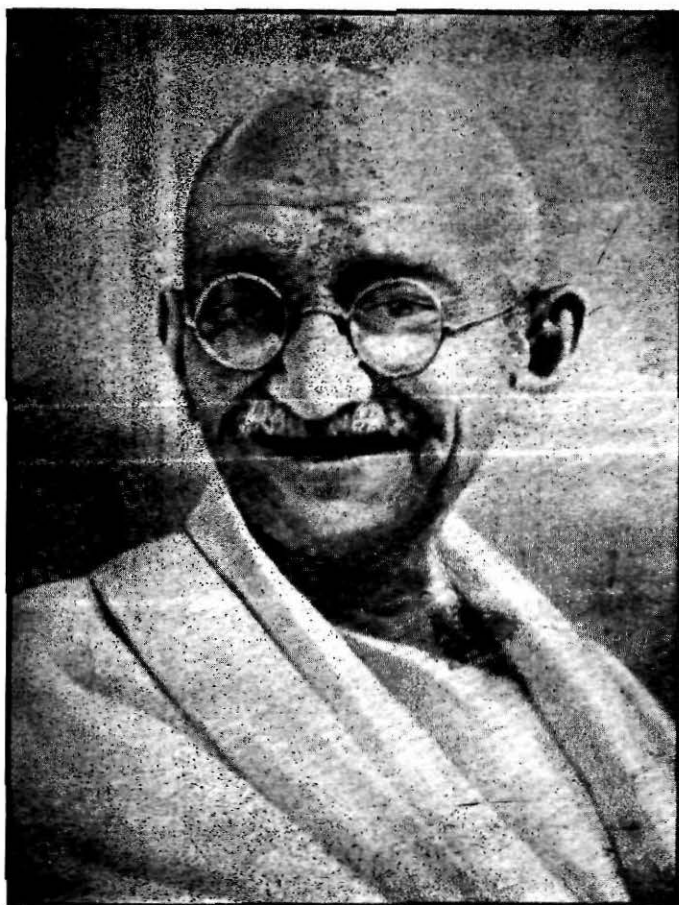
depressed classes, Swami Vivekananda said: "Your duty at present is to go from one part of the country to another, from village to village, and make the people understand that mere sitting about idly won't bring the removal of untouchability. Make them understand their real condition and say, 'O ye brothers, all arise ! Awake ! How much longer would you remain asleep ? Go and advise them how to improve their own condition, and make them comprehend the sublime truths of the Shastras, by presenting them in a lucid and popular way. So long the Brahmins have monopolised religion ; but since they cannot hold their ground against the strong tide of time, go and take steps so that one and all in the land may get that religion. Impress upon their minds that they have the same right to religion as the Brahmins. Initiate all, even down to the *Chandals*, in these fiery *Mantras*. Also instruct them, in simple words, about the necessities of life, and in trade, commerce, agriculture, etc. If you cannot do this, then lie upon your education and culture, and lie upon your studying the Vedas and Vedanta !"

We do hope that all kinds of our institutions—educational, political, social, literary, philanthropic and religious, would interest themselves in this sacred work of uplift on the lines suggested



above. They should come forward to take up in right earnest the reform works with a view to raising the untouchables to the level of the upper classes educationally, culturally and economically. This is the only way for the eradication of the bane of untouchability from the Hindu society. We appeal to the generous public to untie their pursestring for financing this noble work. Really Narayana Himself, existing in all beings, has come down to you in the garb of the depressed Harijan for your eternal salvation. So, never be tempted to feel that by undertaking the task of their emancipation you are doing good to them, but be grateful to them for the opportunity they have given you of worshipping God in them for your own benefit. Swami Vivekananda, the great spiritual reformer, has introduced this divine spirit of service. It is the highest ideal of the age. Indians must cherish this sublime Narayana Seva in their hearts and follow it practically for their social, spiritual and national salvation, and only then can be a real brotherhood established among them his ancient land can thus regain its pristine glory.





# HINDUISM AND UNTOUCHABILITY

## THIRD CHAPTER

*(Mahātma Gandhi and Untouchability)*

In the name of religion we Hindus have made a fetish of outward observances, and have degraded religion by making it simply a question of eating and drinking. Brahmanism owes its unrivalled position to its self-abnegation, its inward purity, its severe austerity, all these illumined by knowledge.

—Mahatma Gandhi



## Hinduism and Untouchability

Against the blot of Untouchability which is not sanctioned in the Hindu Shastras our great religious teachers like Shankara, Ramaunja, Chaitanya, Guru Nanak, Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and a host of others not only befriended the Untouchables, but blazed a trail that there is nothing like Untouchability in Hinduism. Later the Hindu reformers belonging to the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and the Prarthna Samaj and still later pioneers like Keshub Chandra Sen, Kudumal Ranga Rao, V.R. Shinde etc., took a lead in their educational reform. Individual and unorganised efforts there have been many in the past to exorcise the demon of Untouchability from this land, but such attempts never seriously affected the thoughts of the masses of the country: The Anti-Untouchability sermons of such Hindu Social

Reformers of the past never reached a wider public than that of their own city or province. Thus the finger of scorn was always pointed out by the foreigners and the followers of other faiths at the Hindu Society which branded a section of the people within its fold as Untouchables.

But it was not until Mahatma Gandhi's Fast over the Communal Award and the Poona Pact that the movement got an all India recognition. It was not new to Gandhiji because he had to face this problem even in South Africa. In India he threw open his Sabarmati Ashram to Harijans at the risk of losing the financial support of the orthodox Hindus. Even then it may not have gained that prominence and tempo had it not been for the action of the then Premier of England, *Mr. Ramsay Macdonald* and the British Cabinet which gave the Communal Award. By this Award the British Government thought of keeping the Harijans outside the Hindu fold through a system of separate electorates. This was tantamount to dividing the Hindu community to the great detriment of its solidarity and homogeneity. Mahatma Gandhi who was a delegate to the second Round Table Conference declared at the last meeting of the Minorities

Committee on the 13th November, 1931 that he would resist with his life any attempt that might be made by the British Cabinet to divide the Hindu Community through separate electorate. The British Cabinet took lightly his words then and ultimately decided on separate electorate for Harijans. Mahatma Gandhi, the man of his word, the friend and Champion of the underdog, and the greatest Hindu Social Reformer of modern times, lost no time to lodge his emphatic protest against this decision by writing to the Prime Minister of England on 18th August, 1932 that he would fast unto death from the 20th September, 1932 unless the said decision is revised as suggested by him.

Gandhi was at this time in the Yerwada Central Prison and of the morning on 13th September the news of his decision to 'Fast unto death' came as a bolt from the blue. The whole of India from one end to the other, was startled by this news. Its reverberations were felt in England and were echoed back from far-off America. The decision served as a signal for a country wide demand for a revision of the Premier's Award on the one hand and a complete removal of all religious and social disabilities of the 'Untouchables' on the other. The sequence of events was



rapid and 'dramatic. The 'impasse created by Mahatmaji combined with the unwillingness of the British Government to rescind their Award except in exchange for an agreed settlement, promptly stimulated the leaders of caste Hindus to make a revolutionary change of attitude and policy towards the Depressed Classes—a change which, until the other day, would have seemed quite beyond the range of practical politics. Earnest and strenuous negotiations were started, and by the fifth day of the fast an agreement had been reached. The leaders of both communities finally agreed and presented a unanimous Pact known as the famous, "Poona or Yavada Pact", according to which seats were reserved for the Depressed Classes in the general electorates in both Central and Provincial legislatures. Under this Pact they got more seats than was offered under the British Government Award.

This agreement was unanimously accepted at a meeting of the leaders of both caste Hindus and Harijans on September 24th at Poona and requested the British Government to withdraw its Award creating separate electorates within the Hindu Community. This was further rectified by a conference of caste Hindu leaders from all over India held under the chairmanship of

Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya on the 25th September at Bombay, which passed the following resolution unanimously :—

“This conference resolves that henceforth amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an Untouchable by reason of his birth and those who have been regarded hitherto will have the same rights as other Hindus in regard to the use of public roads and other public institutions. This right shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest acts of the Swaraj Parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before that time.”

*(It has since received recognition)*

Some of the statements<sup>1</sup> by public men on Gandhiji's decision to fast—

**By Shri G.D. Birla**

....“The duty of the Depressed Classes is also very clear. Who is a greater well-wisher of them than Gandhiji. Those in England may just like not know, but nobody in India can him for a moment challenge Gandhiji's claim to represent the interests of the Depressed Classes. If a referendum were ta-

1. From 'Epic Fast' by Pyare Lal.

ken, I have not the least doubt that 99 percent of the Depressed population will vote in favour of Gandhiji. The responsibility of the leaders of the Depressed Classes is thus no less onerous than that of others; and I hope they will come out solidly and rally round Gandhiji”.

**By Babu Ramananda Chatterjee**

“From the day that Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of Indian freedom and national solidarity, including the solidarity of the Right in Hindus, he has been ready to literally lay down his life for it at a moment’s notice or even without notice. For people who have not staked their life and all for this cause, as he has done, it must be very difficult to pronounce any opinion on the very serious resolve which he has taken. He has never indulged in bluff. And he has a will of steel. So unless the British Government does what he wants, his resolve will lead to his death. I shrink from the thought of what such self immolation may lead to. But of one thing I am sure. such martyrdom will bring about that Hindu and possibly that Indian, solidarity in the way of which the so-called Award stands. So, whatever the British Government may do, Mahatma Gandhi’s

object will be gained. I humbly think that the Mahatma is right in his resolve."

**By Rabindranath Tagore**

From the beginning of human history there has continued the cleavage between classes, some favoured by circumstances exploiting Humanity the weakness of others and building Multilated the stronghold of their own pride of superiority upon the humiliation of a large section of the community. Though this practice has been prevalent for long yet we must assert that it is against the true spirit of man. No civilized society can thrive upon victims whose humanity has been permanently mutilated whose minds have been compelled to dwell in the dark. Those whom we keep down inevitably, drag us down and obstruct our movement in the path of progress."

**Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru (Dehra Dun Jail)**

"The first news of your decision to fast caused me mental agony and confusion, but ultimately optimism triumphed and I regained peace of mind. No sacrifice is too great for the suppressed and the down-todden classes.

Freedom must be judged by the freedom

won for the lowest. But I feel there is danger of other issues obscuring the only goal

*Magician*    I am unable to judge from a religious point of view. There is danger of your methods being exploited by others. But how can I presume to advise thee Magician ?

**Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya**

“It will be a national disaster and an indelible shame if leaders of Depressed Classes and of the rest of the Hindu community *Indelible* fail, even in the face of the loss *shame* which stares us, to arrive at an agreement on this question. Despite our failure in the past, I honestly believe that there is enough of patriotism and devotion to religion among us to help us to arrive at an agreement, which will satisfy the reasonable desire of the leaders of the Depressed Classes to take their proper share in the public life of India without putting them in a separate pen and segregating them from the rest of the community, in which they are born and to which they adhere in spite of the disadvantages to which they have been exposed.”

**By M.C. Rajah, Harijan leader of Madras**

“The Premier’s award of separate electorates is solely to secure a minimum number of spokes-

men for the Depressed Classes. Mahatma Gandhi's decision is for over-representation of the Depressed Classes. In joint electorate my pact with Dr. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha gives my community reservation of seats on a population basis. I would, therefore ask the Government to take this assurance from me that our best interests require that we should not be dissected from the Hindu Community but that we should have our due representation in legislatures on the basis of reservation. The crisis that faces us today is very grave. There hangs in the balance the life of the greatest Indian of our time, and there hangs in the balance the future of millions of the down-trodden people of this country."

Under such unanimous agreement and pressure from the people of all castes and creeds the British Government had to withdraw its Award and accept the Poona Pact on the 26th September and requested Gandhiji to terminate the Fast.

The Poona Pact acted as a great leaven for social reforms among the Hindus; it was a clarion call for the purification of Hinduism; it echoed throughout the length and breadth of the land.

it engendered in the hearts of millions of caste Hindus a sincere desire to atone for the sin of Untouchability. To give practical proof of their earnestness to remove the blot of Untouchability from the fair face of Hindustan, the thinking, progressive and patriotic Hindus from all over India took advantage of the great force generated by Mahatmaji's Fast and threw open temples, wells, Dharamshalas, schools etc. all over the country. During the fortnight of agony between 13th to 26th September and succeeding weeks the country saw unprecedented enthusiasm to do away with Untouchability. On 14th September all Allahabad temples were thrown open. On 16th September Kalighat temple of Calcutta was thrown open to Harijans. The Depressed Classes of Ahmedabad decided to fast on September, 20th along with Gandhiji. A ballot taken at seven important temples in Bombay resulted in 24,797 persons voting in favour of temple entry for the Harijans while only 448 voted against. In Madras the ancient and most orthodox of the temple, the Kandaswami temple, was opened to Harijans. At Poona the doors of the Parvati temple were flung open spontaneously to Harijans and Shri Rajbhoj who two-and-a-half years before had led a satyagraha, but without success, for

the admission of Harijans into that temple, was the first to enter. What social reformers could not do for decades was thus achieved in a twinkling of the eye by Gandhiji's fast. Temple after temple was thrown open after the Poona Pact was signed. All temples at Patna, Lyallpur, Beawar, Rajbari, Cuttack and other places were thrown open. Inter-caste dinners were held at various places including, Bombay, Delhi, Patna, Nagpur etc.

Untouchability abolition activity reached its high water-mark on the 1st November, 1932 when Dr. Subbarayan's Temple Entry resolution was carried in the Madras Legislative Council without a single dissentient voice, which showed that the heart of the citadel of orthodoxy in India had at last collapsed.

On the 30th September at a mammoth public meeting of Hindu leaders from all over India held at Bombay under the Presidentship of Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya, it was resolved to set up an All India organisation with its headquarters at Delhi and branches in different provincial centres, for the purpose of carrying on propaganda against the observance of Untouchability with Shri G.D. Birla as President and late Shri A.V. Thakkar as General Secretary. Thus came



into being the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh with the following aims and objects :—

“The object of the Sangh shall be the eradication, by truthful and non-violent means, of untouchability in Hindu society with all its incidental evils and disabilities suffered by the so called untouchables, hereinafter described as Harijans, in all walks of life and to secure for them absolute equality of status with the rest of the Hindus.”

### The Whirl-Wind Tour

Mahatma Gandhi did not rest satisfied with these results or the formation of an All India organisation to look after the Welfare of Harijans. He wanted something concrete done for the Harijans and wanted to rouse the conscience of the caste Hindus against the sin of Untouchability. He said :—

“Unless and until we befriend the Harijan, unless and until we treat him as our own brother, we cannot treat humanity as one brotherhood. The whole movement for the removal of Untouchability is a movement for the establishment of universal brotherhood, and nothing less.”

Thus as soon as he was released from jail he

undertook an All India Harijan Tour, which commenced on the 7th of November, 1933 and came to an end in Banares at the end of July, 1934. This tour was a success in many ways. It was first of all a remarkable personal victory for Mahatmaji. In towns or villages from the South to the North and from the East to the West in India was witnessed the over-flowing affection of the people. The tour was also a success looking to the collections in money and materials. A sum of Rs. 8,21,179-15-11, was collected in about 8 months excluding expenses for Harijan work. But the quality of the collections is what matters more than the quantity, for if the rich paid in their thousands, the poor contributed in their hundreds. Thirdly, there was a strong desire, and an infinite feeling, that untouchability must go. In Gandhiji the desire became a warning and the feeling a burning passion. Through his instrumentality a great thought was crystallised into a big fact and a mere theory was translated into a strong organisation. This whirlwind tour lifted the Scheduled Castes or the Harijan problem from the status of a social reform to the pedestal of the greatest socio-religious upheaval of modern Hinduism and

*perhaps the biggest humanitarian movement of modern times.*

### Some Incidents

It is certain that Untouchability will go, but it is not equally certain that Hinduism will remain regenerated. On the one hand, the Harijans as a community have come out of the slough of despond and have become articulate. Palliatives like educational aid or grant of civic rights or even better facilities of employment will no more satisfy them. For they know that they may get all that and yet remain untouchables in Hindu homes and unapproachables in Hindu temples. And it is here that the crucial test comes. How far has there been a real change of heart among the caste Hindus? The long tour of Mahatma Gandhi throws some light on this difficult question. The tour reminds us of some "regrettable" incidents. Black flag demonstration near Ottapallayam, the little scuffle at the Guruvayur meeting, the boisterous demonstration at Buxar, the midnight attack on the car at Jassidhi and the mysterious dropping of a bomb at Poonā. But no great movement which has vehemently attacked ancient customs, religious beliefs, vested interests and strong sentiments met with

such little, almost insignificant opposition, considering that the movement was conducted by a frail man, touring in all parts of the country without protection.

These incidents did not prevent Mahatma Gandhi from carrying on the work of removal of Untouchability throughout the country. Among the eighteen constructive activities that he directed, he gave priority to Harijan work and Hindu Muslim Unity. He was the moving force and guiding spirit of the Harijan Sevak Sangh until his exit from this world on the 30th January, 1948. His attitude was one of 'Prayashchit' of the Hindu Society for their omissions and commissions against the Harijans. . . .

The Sangh under the guidance of Mahatmajī began its activities on a modest scale but with the collections made by Mahatma Gandhi during his All-India Harijan tour in 1933-34 the Harijan welfare work was spread out in all provinces. Propaganda among caste-Hindus to convince them that Untouchability was un-Hindu, that it is a blot on Hinduism and the greatest social evil which was eating into the vitals of the Hindu Society and therefore required to be removed was the mission on which the Sangh concentrated its attention. The task of bringing about a

change of heart in the minds of the Hindus, steeped in age-long tradition and orthodoxy, was not an easy matter. Yet the Harijan Sevak Sangh carried on its work with persistence and steadiness that the old prejudice against the removal of Untouchability has almost become a thing of the past. In this task the Sangh had to face the orthodox opposition and contend against the fury of the orthodox elements resulting in assault and other kinds of insult and injury to the caste-Hindu Harijan Sevak and the Harijans themselves. This was particularly so in the rural and outlying parts of the country where the landed classes and the general masses of the people are superstitious and ignorant, where the caste and feudal loyalties are strong and where the economic interests of the privileged classes are intimately and inextricably connected with Harijans. To this must be added the unhelpful attitude in some cases adopted by the various provincial Governments in those days of pre-independence. Under such circumstances the work of the Sangh was naturally slow.

Mahatma Gandhi, speaking at the annual meeting of the Harijan Sevak Sangh held at Sevagram on the 14th August, 1945, discussed the ideal and method of the Sangh—how far the Sangh

had succeeded in securing the abolition of Untouchability! His feeling was that it was a slow process but if workers of the right type and equipment were available their progress would be sure and rapid. Future progress according to him, would depend very much on securing workers of that kind who would be ready to stake everything for the cause. He emphasised that in giving a new status to the Harijans, it was necessary to work for the removal of their untouchability and to secure for them social and civic rights, as also to expedite their progress in education. Mahatmaji felt that the growth of self-consciousness among the Harijans would in due course of time bring about transformation in the outlook of the non-Harijan Hindus. He advised the workers to carry on intensive constructive work all over India agreeably to the feelings and wishes of the Harijans, with a view to bringing them to the level of the advanced classes in all respects. Replying to a question put to him by a prominent Harijan leader of Madras, Mahatmaji observed : "Let us not forget that untouchability is a most difficult thing to remove and our task is a heavy one. But I have no doubt that God will remove untouchability or remove Hinduism."

The next important aspect of the work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh relates to the removal of the civic and social disabilities of the Harijans. Their right to use public roads, tanks and wells, as well as the right of temple entry had to be secured by legislation. Some of the Indian States were sympathetic and so, this question of Temple Entry for Harijans was first started in the States. The Sangh decided that the best place where this vexed question could be satisfactorily solved was Travancore, as conditions there were very favourable for propaganda in favour of temple entry. The Harijan Sevak Sangh Delhi, therefore organised a vigorous campaign advocating temple entry in Travancore and Shri G.D. Birla, the President, Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru, the Vice-President and Shri A.V. Thakkar, the General Secretary under took a tour in Travancore in connection with the Temple Entry campaign.

The Maharaja of Travancore under the able and wise guidance of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the then Dewan of Travancore, rose to the occasion and promulgated the Temple Entry Proclamation<sup>43</sup> on the 12th November, 1936. It

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43. The Epic of Travancore by Mahadev Desai.

stated thus :—

“Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on an all-comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice it has, throughout the centuries adapted itself to the needs of the changing times, solicitous that none of Our Hindu subjects should by reason of birth, caste or community, be denied the consolation and solace of the Hindu Faith. We have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by Us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at temples controlled by Us and Our Government.”

The Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation had its repercussion all over the country. Opinion every where was veering round in its favour. Travancore was followed by other Indian States like Gwalior, Indore, Baroda etc. Many temples in India were also thrown open to Harijans.

The opening of Shri Minakshi Temple, Madurai



to Harijans was the next important land-mark in Temple Entry movement. The efforts of Shri G.D. Birla, Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru and Shri A.V. Thakkar and the efforts of Shri A. Vaidyanath Iyer, president of the Tamil Nad Harijan Sevak Sangh, was responsible for this Madura Miracle. It is not necessary to enumerate here the circumstances under which several temples, big and small, were thrown open to Harijans after the Travancore and Madura Miracles. Suffice to say that the prejudice against temple entry was completely removed by the Travancore, Madura Miracles. Thereafter, it was an easy matter for the various legislatures in the country to pass measures enforcing temple entry for Harijans. The Madras Legislature under Rajaji's leadership being the first in the field.

Now in its 28th year the Sangh has spread out its activities all over the country. It is spending annually about 30 lakhs on all its activities through its 25 State branches and 240 District organisations with a band of over 300 full-time paid workers stationed all over the country. It is maintaining over 120 mixed Harijan Hostels, 60 cooperative societies, 145 schools, 'balwadis' and Social Centres with three Industrial Training Centres.

This curse of Untouchability has come down to us from time immemorial and has taken deep-root and therefore it will still take some time, specially as the people are ignorant and orthodox. Old and rigid customs stand as obstacle in the way. However, to-day all the important temples in India have been thrown open to Harijans. Now no school in the country can refuse to admit a Harijan simply on the plea of his being a Harijan.



# HINDUISM AND UNTOUCHABILITY

## Fourth Chapter

*(After Independence)*

“Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

—Article 17 of the Constitution

It is nobody's intention, least of all Gandiji's to deprive the Depressed Classes of their due and more than their due representation. Let that be secured in a generous and ungrudging spirit without cutting up Hindu Society and treating the Depressed Classes even for a temporary period as separate from it.

—Dr. Rajendra Prasad



## Hinduism and Untouchability

With the dawn of Freedom the Congress Government gave its first recognition to the Scheduled Castes by appointing Dr. Ambedkar, a Harijan leader and a Doctor of Laws to draft the Constitution for the Free and Independent India. Thus, a Harijan became the first law-maker for the bigger and Free India and for the orthodox Hindus who had strictly followed Manu the orthodox law-giver of the Hindus from time immemorial, which shows the generous outlook of the majority of the Hindus who have begun to realise their mistakes and decided to change with the time.

Again the first Act of the Parliament of Free India was to give statutory recognition to the resolution passed under Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya on the 25th September, 1932 at Bombay

giving equal rights to Harijans as to other Hindus.

Under Fundamental Rights, Articles 15, 16 and 17, it is laid down that:—

15. (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
- 2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to—
  - (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or
  - (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State Funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.
16. (1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state.

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State.

17. "Untouchability" is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

Under Article 330 the Scheduled Castes were given reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sadhas on the basis of revised population figures. Under Article 335 a certain percentage of appointments in the Central and State Government services are reserved for Harijans consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of Administration. Under Article 338 a special officer under the President to look after the interest of the Scheduled Castes was also appointed.

The Scheduled Caste Order 1936 of the Government of India which included only the Harijans of British India was superseded by a longer and fuller list known as the Constitution



(Scheduled Castes) Order 1950. This Order was later superseded by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists (Modification) Order 1956 of the President which included more Castes and Tribes that suffered from some disabilities or other.

Another land-mark in the removal of untouchability came with the passing of the Untouchability (Offences) Act 1955, by the Indian Parliament which came into force from 1st June, 1955. It made it a cognisable offence to prevent any one from the exercise of his civic rights or from entering into and worshiping in any temple or drawing water from public wells and tanks etc. Likewise restaurant and hotel-keepers and dhobis and barbers who refused to serve Harijans simply on the plea of their being Harijans come within the purview of the Act. Under the Untouchability (Offences) Act persons professing the Buddhist, Sikh or Jain religion or persons professing the Hindu religion in any of its forms or developments including Virashaivas, Lingayats, Adivasis, followers of Brahma, Prarthana, Arya Samaj and Swaminarayan Sampradaya are considered as Hindus. Although the civic rights of the Scheduled Castes are protected by law, in practice it

is difficult to eradicate Untouchability only by force of law. Gandhiji said, "Untouchability will not be removed even by force of the law. It can only be removed when the majority of Hindus realise that it is a crime against God and man and are ashamed of it. In other words, it is a process of conversion i.e. purification of the Hindu heart. The aid of law has to be invoked when it hinders or interferes with the progress of the reform."

The sure way to eradicate Untouchability is to educate public opinion against this evil. For this purpose it is generally accepted that publicity and propaganda are essential and it can be more effectively carried out through non-official agencies than through Government bodies. Because, Governments cannot afford to lead in matters of reform. By their very nature Governments are but interpreters and executors of the expressed will of the people whom they govern, and even a most autocratic Government will find itself unable to impose a reform which its people cannot assimilate. It is for this reason that the Government of India and the State Governments have been encouraging non-official organisations of All India character.

On the expenditure on welfare work for the Backward Classes, the Home Minister Pt. Govind Ballabh Pant, "Revealed that during the First Five Year Plan Rs. 39 crores had been provided for the welfare of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes but he was not sure whether that amount was fully utilised or not. For the second Five Year Plan period Rs. 91 crores has been earmarked and if they are able to put it to proper use that amount for the benefit of these Backward Classes before the expiry of the plan period, perhaps, more funds could be obtained."

#### *Educational*

Considerable progress has been made by the Union, and State Governments and other non-official organisations in the matter of educational advancement of the scheduled castes. The total expenditure incurred by all for the purpose during the first Plan period runs to over 12 crores. For the Second Five Year Plan there is a provision of 32-37 crores for the educational progress of the Backward Classes. In addition the State Governments are spending huge sums of money out of their own funds outside the plan, on schemes for the promotion of education. During the last ten years that is from 1949-50 to 1958-59

according to the Commissioner's Report for 1958-59 Scheduled caste Students were awarded 1,20,014 scholarships to the tune of Rs. 4,85,13,337 by the Government of India alone for Post-Matric studies in India. In some of the states education is free upto Matriculation standard while in other states the scheduled castes are exempted from the payment of tuition fee. In many states hostels are run for the benefit of scheduled caste students by the states and non-official agencies and Harijan students are awarded hostel expenses by the Governments.

**Land :—**

A large percentage of scheduled castes are land-less labourers and the Governments, Centre and States are trying their best to settle them on :—

- (a) cultivable waste and other land with the State
- (b) land released through the imposition of ceilings on land holding and
- (c) Bhoodan and Gramdan lands.

Nine states have allotted 23,90,522 acres of land to scheduled castes. Most of the States and Union Territories have adopted legislative and executive measures for providing agricultural

land to scheduled castes. In Bihar the allotments are made by Revenue officials without consulting Panchayats except in certain areas. Five acres of agricultural land per family are allotted and no granting fee is charged for this. The Government of Bombay have issued orders to give preference to members of the Backward classes in respect of grant of waste land for cultivation and has accordingly directed that in all districts, a systematic attempt should be made to give out for cultivation to the Backward Classes and lessees all waste lands including those leased under "grow more food campaign" and forest lands which can more advantageously be used for cultivation. The land-less labourers are further given financial aid to purchase agricultural equipments to develop the land allotted to them. Bhoodan and Gramdan Yagna started by Acharya Vinoba Bhave have now assumed a nation-wide importance and have become one of the foremost sources from which relief for the landless Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who form a very large proportion of the landless are naturally benefitting from the drive. The distribution requires certain special laws to facilitate the work and towards this end some of the states like U.P., Bihar, Orissa and Madhya

Pradesh have passed measures and the settlement of landless agricultural workers is taking place.

To improve the economic condition of the Scheduled Castes Cottage Industries are being encouraged in rural areas. This programme has two aspects namely raising the level of traditional village industries which had languished or are carried on by these communities in an archaic and crude manner by better organisation, supply of raw materials and marketing etc. and by progressive introduction of new cottage industries as means of livelihood for landless and under-employed agriculturists. Several all India Organisations like the Khadi and Village Industries Board, Hand-Loom Board, Coir Board etc. have been set up to give work to the Harijans and to develop important Cottage Industries. Up to date more than 231 crores have been incurred under this head.

The housing condition of the scheduled castes was unsatisfactory from the beginning both in rural and urban areas and which has to a great extent affected their health. The Government has taken steps for improving their housing condition. The Central Government has issued directives to the State Governments to allot house-

sites, acquire land where needed and to give financial aid for house-building etc. On an average Rs. 1000/- is estimated to cost for a house in rural areas and the Government pays Rs. 750/- in instalments and the balance of Rs. 250/- has to be found by the Harijans in the form of manual labour.

#### *Reservation in Services*

Under this head a certain percentage of appointments have been reserved for the scheduled castes and during the last 10 years every effort was made to fill up the quota. While the response is good in the lower grades, the upper grades and to the executive posts the representation has not come up to the mark. This may be due to the fact that suitable candidates are not forthcoming. Being poor, as soon as they complete the high school or the Matric. the Harijans are absorbed in the lower grades. It is hoped that with the facilities accorded and relaxation of age limit the number will gradually go up.

As regards representation in the Parliament and Legislatures it is on population basis. Not only they have got full quota but a number of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been elected from the general seats also which shows

that the Government, the Congress and the Hindu community as a whole sincerely desire to bring forward their long neglected brethren. To-day at the Centre there is one Cabinet Minister and two Deputy Ministers, while in the States there is one Chief Minister, thirteen Ministers, 10 Deputy Ministers and two Parliamentary Secretaries from the Scheduled Castes.

#### *Scavengers and Sweepers*

Ways and means to improve the working condition of the scavengers and sweepers is being undertaken. Though the wages of the scavengers and sweepers are much better than other Harijans but they are mostly in debt and live in squalor and their working condition is worse still. A number of enquiry committees were appointed from time to time but the reports of these committees have not been given effect to by the Municipalities which in most cases are elected bodies. These Municipalities are in the grip of party-politics and financial difficulties and thus the working conditions of the sweepers are neglected and the same old method of cleaning still goes on. The methods of removing and carrying night-soil are most unhygienic. Repeated requestes from the Centre and State Governments.



to the Municipalities for improving these methods have fallen on deaf ears. The Hindus consider certain animals and certain professions as unclean and those who keep them or carry on such work are treated as unclean. Scavenging and sweeping are the main causes for treating the Bhangi as an untouchable. Such inhuman conditions have got to be improved at the earliest opportunity. The Government is trying its best to do away with these dirty methods. Municipalities and local bodies are being given generous grants for providing their municipal employees with improved and modern implements like wheel-barrrows, brooms hand-carts etc. It is hoped that with the installation of flush latrines, septic-tanks and other scavenger-free latrines in place of the old bucket-type latrines their condition will improve.

### *Conclusion*

Untouchability is not sanctioned by the Hindu Shastras and history does not tell us when and how it originated. Suffice to say that it is old and through passage of time these ancient customs and social conduct of the Hindus passed on to us first by word of mouth and later they underwent changes and modifications at the

hands of writers and law-makers to suit the interests of their own community. The people of India though following a common religion were divided into small independent kingdoms with different languages which naturally helped to make these changes go unchallenged or unnoticed. The Britishers were the first to bring the whole of India and Burma under a single Government but they thought it wise not to make any change in the customs and social codes of the people who were alien to them. Thus it was left to Gandhiji and the Indian National Congress to tackle this demon of untouchability on an all India basis nearly thirty years ago, but Gandhiji did not live long enough after Independence to see untouchability rooted out completely. However, credit must be given to his lieutenants like Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, Pt. Govind Ballabh Pant etc., for carrying on the unfinished work of Gandhiji unabated. Within ten years of Independence vast progress has been made to eradicate this evil. Let us hope that within the next decade that is by 1970 when the constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes will come to an end, it will be a thing of the past.

We cannot deny the fact that the Hindu social institutions as it exists to-day reveals contradictions, crudities and disharmonies, but we have to accept at the same time that beneath the surface there are strong currents of principles working silently towards harmony. Such contradictions are true of the social institutions of all mankind, yet the truth is beyond denial that most social institutions have served mankind towards his betterment. The outer disharmony or oddity, if there is any, belongs to the conditions or contexts of time and place.

Om Shanti: Shanti: Shanti:



## OPINIONS

*of Distinguished Persons*

**Prof. Priya Ranjan Sen, M. A., P. R. S.  
Secretary, the Harijan Sévak Sangh, Bengal:—**

I have read Swāmi Sundarananda's book on Untouchability—a major stumbling block in the way of Indian independence, and a social evil of the first magnitude. This evil has to be brought home to the caste Hindus because it is they eventually who can alter the shape of things and remove the infamy by declaring, as the Emperor of Japan did in the seventies, that untouchability shall cease at once. How can we move the hearts of caste Hindus? Merely to call the untouchables by the name 'Harijan' is surely no remedy, but to take them as God's men, as men who are divine in the service they render to their fellow-men, and to learn to respect them, is. Throwing the temples open to them; declaring them to have the right of walking through roads and using public wells, helping them to education and rendering pecuniary assistance on emergent

occasions—all these may ease the situation but the caste Hindus must also be roused to the consciousness of their own responsibility for this great evil. Swami Sundarananda's book, conceived in the right spirit, is a timely publication and I welcome it as such. It contains abundant references to many great souls who have expressed themselves emphatically in this matter, and it is prompted by a sincerity of purpose and real feeling. May it help the great cause which all nationalists in India have in view, the eradication of the evil, and the restoration of a healthy attitude towards society and social obligations.

19. 8. 45

**Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, M.A. (Cal.)  
D. Lit. (Lond.). F.R.A.S.B. :—**

Swami Sundarananda's 'Hinduism and Untouchability' is a timely book, and a challenging book which all critics of Hinduism both within and without the fold of the Hindu faith should read and ponder over—and try to put into practice the suggestions for removing this canker of present-day Hindu society. For the writer is not content to be a mere chronicler of expressed views of the thought-leaders of Hindudom from

time immemorial to the present-day on this social sin—he has been following them also (and particularly the great Swami Vivekananda of thrice blessed memory) by treating the problem as a living problem of present-day Indian life which is making very largely our well-intentioned endeavours futile in all directions of economic, political, cultural and spiritual rehabilitation. Our young men, led away too much by the glamour of the foreign and the exotic have lost or are losing living touch with the deathless teachings and injunctions of Hinduism seeking to regulate the relations between man and man—between one manifestation of the Supreme Spirit and another, and are straying afar from remedies for the evils of to-day which have been time and often proclaimed by their own thinkers and spiritual leaders. All this is largely the result of a lack of an idealistic view of life and a swerve to the materialistic attitude which is now so blatantly blared forth by many an “ism” from Europe. We forget we must take the best that Europe has to offer—particularly the Greek spirit of freedom of the intellect which is the basis of European culture—and adapt that best to our needs and not blindly hitch our national progress to the policy of this or that country in the

West, or for the matter of that, in the East. Swami Vivekananda in a way was the greatest spokesman of the dumb inarticulate and exploited masses of India, and it is time we listened once again to this great soul, whose voice was a voice crying in the wilderness over 40 years ago, but whose message lives for ever, and which can still revive and energise a whole people, even the whole of humanity.

20. 8. 45.

**Swami Sharvananda of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur (Howrah) :—**

"I read with great interest Swami Sundaranda's book—'Hindusim and Untouchability'. Its publication has been most opportune at a time when India is trying to rejuvenate herself by discarding all her weaknesses and redressing all the sore-spots in her body-politic. All the great Indian leaders of thought are unanimous in pointing out that untouchability has been a great curse in Hindu social life, the like of which is not found in any human society anywhere and it has been one of the chief sources of disintegration and break-down of the national life of India.

Probably the genesis of this segregation of a class of people as "untouchables" in ancient time lay in the un-Aryan habits of the aborigines as regards food, marriage, and some other social manners and customs. Some of these unclean habits are still persisting in them, for instance, the Pariahs and Puliahs of the South, the Dhers of Bombay Presidency and some "untouchables" of Rajputana are still accustomed to eat the carcass of dead cows, buffaloes and even of horses and dogs. Further, owing to their extreme dirty habit and unclean profession, the gulf between the so-called caste Hindus and these so-called "untouchables" became wide and unbridgeable.

However, it is a well-known fact of History that the great merit of the Indo-Aryans was in their most unobtrusive and peaceful method of Aryanisation of the aborigines of the land. Perhaps in ancient time the process was slow evidently due to the lack of means of easy communication between distant parts of India. But there is no doubt that the process was much hampered and the wheel of progress was hitched by arrogance and the selfish motive of exploiting them for mean works by the upper classes.



Whatever might have been the causes of untouchability in ancient India, it must be said that they do not and need not exist to-day, in this 20th century when man can be made conscious of the dignity of the human soul, and his unclean habits can be rectified by proper scientific and moral education. It was done in ancient India, although individually. Now it has to be *en masse*, the whole class that has been depressed and ostracized by the appellation. "untouchables," has to be raised and made clean by giving them the proper education and the Aryan culture.

India as a nation cannot rise politically, and even culturally, unless we root out all disintegrating influences that are cankering her soul, and revitalize her by spreading the same Aryan culture through all the limbs of her national life.

Swami Sundarananda has given ample evidences from the Hindu scriptures to show that the segregation of a class of men as untouchables is not only unpolitic but unholy also.

10. 10. 45.

## PRESS REVIEWS

### *Hindusthan Standard :-*

“The book is a timely publication for the English-speaking people of India who are interested in the higher evolution of Indian Society along national lines as chalked out by Swami Vivekananda. Amongst other things of Hindu Socio-religious interest it also deals at length with the question of the ‘depressed’ classes which form the weakest point in the armour of Hinduism. Should the depressed classes of the Hindu Society still continue to be treated as “Outcastes” by the caste-Hindus much in the same way as Christians or the Mohammedans are outside the Socio-religious constitution of Hinduism? The author has discussed the question from the view point of the historical evolution of the Indian Society which is born of the depths of ages. The treatment of the question which is now pressed to the front for immediate solution, appears to have been more secular, utilitarian

and political than religious or spiritual, properly so-called Hinduism represents a type of religion which stands by itself-alone and apart, refusing to be judged and understood by the accepted tests and standards of other creeds and religions. The question has been rightly discussed from the view point of temporal gain to the Society of the Hindus. And this has been necessitated by the fact that while the Christian propagandists have been thinking of bringing the so-called depressed classes under the elevating influences of their Church, the Mohamedans have also been thinking of strengthening their community by the conversion of the many millions of the so-called "out-castes" to their faith and thereby acquire a new power in politics. Is it not a fact that most of the Mohammedans in India were Hindus formerly; but conversion weaned them away from the common race. Indeed, from the political point of view, the conversion of so many millions of the population of India to the Islamic faith, would surely open up such new prospects which have become most imperative to wield power in the world of India politics as moulded by the recent labours of the Cabinet Mission. Swami Vivekananda with the prophetic vision saw through things and in consequence

prescribed in advance remedies to the new maladies that would overtake India, if the depressed classes of the country were left to themselves to drift away in the crosscurrents of Indian politics. He, therefore, most emphatically warned the bigoted Hindus against committing racial suicide by keeping any longer the depressed classes of the Hindu society outside the pale of the Hindu community. And indeed that is why he said : "Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the cases of willing converts, returning to the Mother-Church, as it were. But on those who were alienated by conquests as in Kashmir and Nepal or on strangers wishing to join us, no penance should be imposed." In these days of forced conversion of the Hindu in to the faith of Islam by barbarous hordes in Bengal under the present day Muslim regime and specially in view of the recent pronouncement by the great leader of the Muslim League we strongly recommend the book to our readers. (17th Nov. 1946, Daily Edition, published from Calcutta.)

*Amrita Bazar Patrika* :—

In view of what has happened in recent months and is still happening, removal of un-

touchability has perhaps become one of the greatest problems for Hindus. This is their own internal or domestic problem, no matter whether or how they are going to settle matters with the Muslim Leaguers. "If Hinduism is to survive it must be casteless," said Mahatma Gandhi in one of his post-Prayer speeches. No words were more true judging from the present posture of Indian affairs. Fifty years or more ago Swami Vivekananda realised that this untouchability was a terrible black spot on Hindu Society and not Hindu religion, for Hindu religious scriptures nowhere condoned or supported this vile and irrational practice; on the contrary, they condemned it in no uncertain terms. The Swamiji also realised and gave emphatic expression to his conviction that the future of Hinduism was bleak and dark unless and until untouchability in every shape and form was totally made a thing of the past. We are, therefore, very glad to come across a little book entitled "Hinduism and Untouchability" written by Swami Sundarananda, a monk of Ramkrishna order, who has made a life-long study of this vital problem. In this treatise the author has dealt mainly with the social-religious and national aspects of the

problem and has conclusively established by irrefutable arguments and citations from Hindu scriptures that untouchability was never sanctioned by religion and that its continuance will virtually mean the deathknell of Hinduism. We earnestly commend this book to all who desire a thorough reconstruction of Hindu society on a rational basis. We have so long merely toyed with the problem. If Hindus want to be strong, united and prosperous, they must without a moment's delay seriously study the problem and take practical steps to remove this vicious thing from Hindu Society root and branch. (16th Feb. 1947, Daily Edition, published from Calcutta).

*Modern Review :*

The author, who is a member of the Ramakrishna Mission, is of opinion that Hinduism does not really contain any sanction for the vicious system of untouchability; the degradation to which the caste system has dragged down the Hindu Society is the result of priestly selfishness and a spirit of conservatism not keeping in with the best traditions of Hinduism as they were handed down the centuries by an unbroken series of Philosophers and saints. He holds that

a radical social reform must precede the political emancipation of India; and in the matter of establishing a democratic society, we have much to learn from the West.

The author pleads with passion, and at the same time comes forward with a practical scheme of social uplift and educational reform among the untouchables of to-day; he feels rightly that mere pious sentiment will be of no use. (Feb. 1947, monthly, published from Calcutta.)

*Vedanta Keshari* :

This book was originally published in 1922. It is now published with the necessary additions and alterations which the lapse of almost quarter of a century has demanded and is also provided with a brief forward by Dr. Syama Prasad Mukherji, President, All-India Hindu Mahasabha. The problem of untouchability in Hinduism is discussed from the social point of view in the first chapter and from the national point of view in the second, and throughout there is an eloquent plea for the removal of untouchability, which is a blot on Hinduism and Hindu Society. Swami Vivekananda, whose opinions on the subject are profusely quoted in this book, once declared that "no religion on earth pre-

ches the dignity of humanity in such a bold strain as Hinduism and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and low in such a fashion as Hinduism". This discrepancy between theory and practice is the result of superstition, bigotry and the misunderstanding of scriptures. Castes were originally functional and not hereditary and there were no impossible barriers in ancient times between one caste and another as now. Our scriptures record how Valmiki, Vyasa and Visva-Mitra rose to Brahminhood from the lower castes. In fact, the great object of the Hindu system of Varnashrama was to raise the Kshatriya, the Vaisya, the Sudra and even the primitive tribes to the rank of Brahminhood from their respective position by slow, steady and gradual process. Accordingly, Swami Vivekananda in his great speech on the Mission of Vedanta delivered at Kumbakanam declared,

"There is law said on each one of you in this land by your ancestors, whether you are Aryans or non-Aryans. Rishis or Brahmins or the very lowest outcastes. The command is the same to you all, that you must make progress without stopping and that, from the highest man to the



lowest Pariāh, every one in this country has to try and become the ideal Brahmin. Such is our ideal of castes as meant for raising all humanity slowly and gently towards the realisation of that great ideal of the spiritual man, who is non-resisting, calm, steady, worshipful, pure and meditative”.

There are again innumerable instances in historical times of men of the lowest castes and of untouchable classes who have risen to the rank of saint-hood by the purity of their lives and the intensity of their devotion to God. And the images of these images of these saints—Tiruppana Alvar, Nanda, Chokhamela and Nompodwan—are worshipped in temples and their birthday ceremonies observed by orthodox Brahmin priests even to this day. The great leaders of Hindu Society from time immemorial have condemned the evil custom of untouchability. Ramananda, Nanak, Tukaram, Chaitanya and in recent times, Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda, Ranade, Tilak, Madan Mohan Malaviya and above all, Mahatma Gandhi have pleaded for the absorption of the Depressed classes into Hindu Society. It was only the other day that Mahatma Gandhi said.

"Let us not forget that untouchability is a most difficult thing to remove and our task is a difficult one. But I have no doubt that God will remove untouchability or remove Hinduism", (Nov. 1946, Monthly, published from Madras).

*Prabhuddha Bharata*

At a stirring period of Indian History when nationalism is struggling to find expression, when the problem of untouchability has been very much before us, the publication of Swami Sundarananda's book the author discusses the problem of untouchability from the socio-religious stand point by assembling passages from the teachings and writings of these saints and savants who have solved the problem in the light of Vedantic principle which affirms the presence of the eternal reality in all beings—high and low—irrespective of all denominations. The Swami rightly concludes in the second section of the book that the achievement of national unity—the only means of independence and social regeneration—is possible by breaking isolated groups and artificial barriers which are responsible for the diseases of the Indian body politics. In short the author uncovers the rags and shells

which, hide the essentials of Hinduism, and pleades for real unity—the unity that is essential for the future peace, prosperity and glory of India. (July 1947, Monthly published from Mayavati, Dst., Almora, U.P.)



